

VACATION DEFICIENCY DISORDER • DAVID SIROTA ON HONEST GRAFT

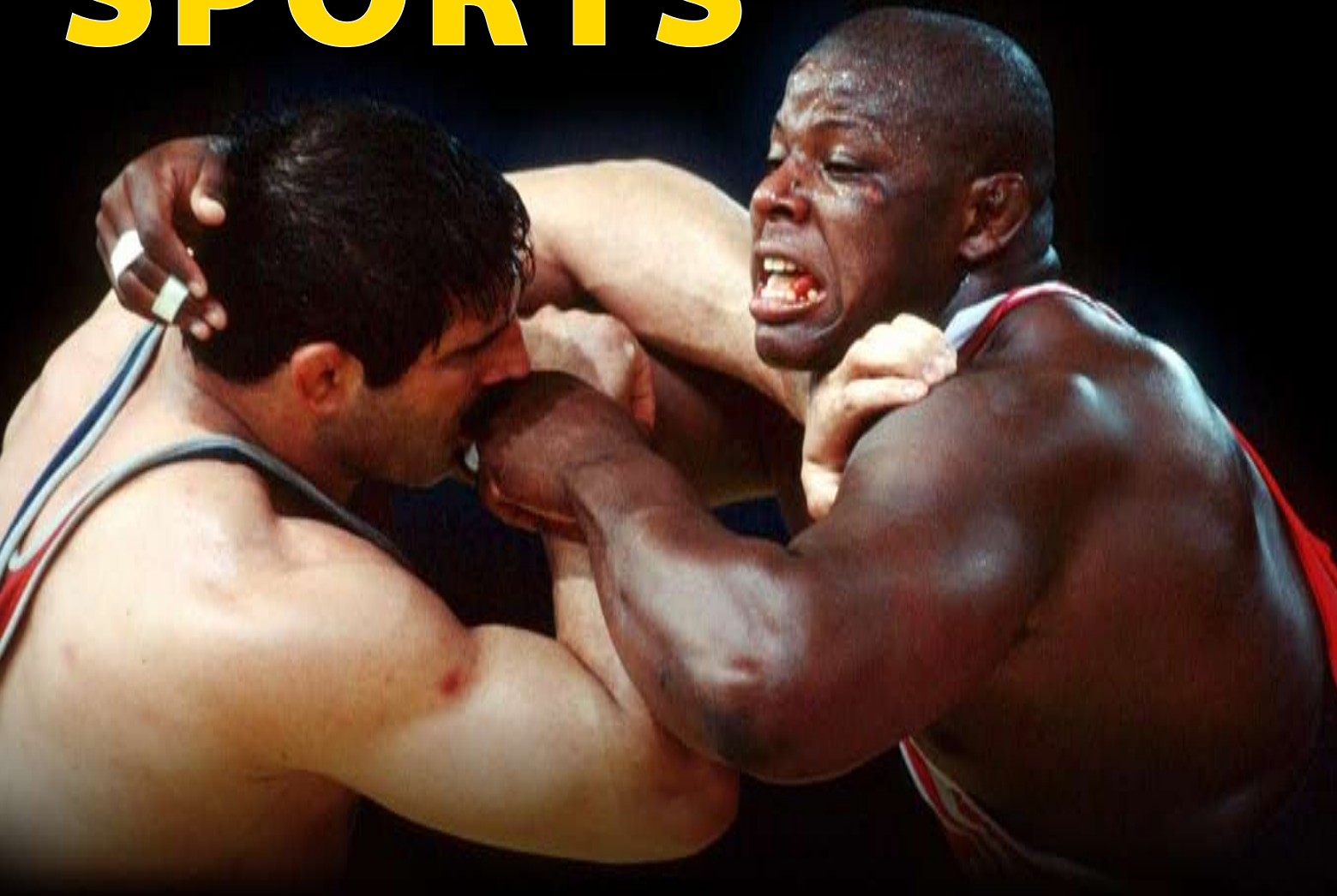
JULY 2007

IN THESE TIMES

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graduates **sellout**

The Pentagon's
contraception
politics

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**+ L.A.'s Transgendered
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BY KARI LYDERSEN

Thicker Than Oil

AT THE END of May, the third bloodiest month of his 50-month Iraq War, President George W. Bush, red-white-and-blue wreath in hand, staged a Memorial Day photo op at Arlington National Cemetery with its freshly dug graves.

"Now this hallowed ground receives a new generation of heroes," intoned Bush. "Our enemies long for our retreat. They question our moral purpose. ... Yet even after five years of war, our finest citizens continue to answer our enemies with courage and confidence."

At the same time, across the country "our finest citizens"—members of Iraq Veterans Against the War—gathered with courage, confidence and moral purpose, to give truth to the lies of this one-time oil executive who conned the nation into war.

Forty years ago, a turning point in the Vietnam War occurred when veterans returned home and founded the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. They took to the streets to demand the war's end. This past Memorial Day, some of those same vets and their modern-day counterparts, Iraq Veterans Against the War, gathered at the Vietnam War Memorial in Chicago. In a small park on the banks of the Chicago River in the north Loop they commemorated fallen friends and condemned failed leaders.

Vince Emanuele, in the vets' trademark desert camouflage, was among those who spoke. Now 23, this former lance corporal from Chesterton, Ind., a steel town 40 miles east of Chicago, graduated from high school in 2002 and joined the Marines. Home on leave in 2003, he saw Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. He returned to Iraq a vocal—and uniformed—opponent of the war.

In a quaking voice, he told the Memorial Day crowd how he had killed a man, and two days later saw his best friend die in a firefight. "I will be active in the antiwar movement until the day I die," he told me the next day. "The war is a money-making machine. And it hurts to

think of it that way. It hurts to know that you have been used."

But knowledge is power, and armed with what they know, the Iraq Veterans Against the War are speaking out. Founded in 2004 and with a membership of about 500, the group is gaining 10 new members a week, a number bound to grow as soldiers who have served in Iraq opt not to re-enlist and return home, free to speak.

Standing in Arlington, cameras rolling, Bush told the nation, "Tens of thousands who have seen war on the battlefield volunteer to re-enlist." He did not mention re-enlistment rates have fallen sharply. Indeed, the military now pays its soldiers rewards of up to \$150,000 to convince them to "volunteer to re-enlist."

Other soldiers go AWOL. In the last two years, desertions from the Army have risen 35 percent.

Luke, Leif and Leo Kamunen deserted on Jan. 2. Luke and Leif, 21-year-old twins, and Leo, their 20-year-old brother, are from the northern Minnesota town of Cloquet. Descendants of Finns, a famously independent ethnic group in the North Woods, the brothers came home on Christmas leave and, unbeknownst to each other, each decided not to return to base.

Leif, whose girlfriend had had a baby, told the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, "Halfway through basic training, I didn't want to be there anymore."

Leo explained he met a woman he really liked. "I decided there was no way I could be apart from her for long periods of time when I didn't feel so strongly about fighting for George Bush's war."

Luke said he overslept and missed his plane. "We saw each other a couple days later, and we're saying, 'What, you didn't go back, either?'"

For the Kamunens, blood is thicker than oil. And they are not alone in knowing that living at home beats dying in Iraq.

—Joel Bleifuss

IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



37: Age of the average fantasy player—a white, male, college graduate with an annual household income of \$76,689

2 million: Number of Americans who go on-line each day to follow their fantasy teams

38: Average number of minutes that the 16 million fantasy players think about fantasy sports each day

\$196 million: Amount lost by companies nationwide for every 10 minutes of the workday that employees spend on fantasy football

“

Sports itself is not play but ritual in which the subjected celebrate their subjection. ... The passion for sport, in which the masters of mass culture sense the real mass basis of their dictatorial power, is grounded in this fact.

”

—THEODOR ADORNO, “THE SCHEMA OF MASS CULTURE”

LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

Can global warming be addressed without first addressing campaign financing? Not as long as Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) heads the House's Energy Committee and Rep. Rick Boucher (D-Va.) heads the Energy subcommittee on climate change. In the last election cycle, the electric utility industry gave Dingell \$153,107 and Boucher \$127,108 in campaign contributions, ranking them second and third, respectively, among all

House candidates. Dingell was the auto industry's No. 1 candidate, reaping \$82,100, while Boucher ranked No. 2 for Big Coal, which gave him \$39,367.

THE QUO:

The two men wrote a draft of a new energy bill that would prevent the EPA from granting states a waiver for their vehicle emissions rules if they are “designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.” Twelve states—including California—have already done this.



Unfortunately for these twin sock puppets of Big Energy, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) has made it clear that she won't introduce any bill that weakens her state's strict emissions regulations.

letters



Tamil child soldiers

I am a Sri Lankan Tamil living in Sydney, Australia. I read Terry Allen's "America's Child Soldier Problem" (June 2007), and wanted to thank you for your different perspective on child soldiers and U.S. military aid to governments like Sri Lanka. As a child and a teenage girl living in Jaffna, I saw horrible things happening all around me—mortar shellings, aerial bombings, random killings of civilians, the army identifying "terror suspects" from a queue of civilians in our local market place. Two of my childhood mates joined the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) when they were 15—child soldiers, no doubt. Tamil children see things on a daily basis that no child should see in a lifetime, and this makes them "different."

Anu Prakash
Via e-mail

The parallax review

Slavoj Žižek's review of "The Lives of Others" (June 2007) must be about a different film. It was so remote from the film's content and objectives as to be comical.

That Žižek twice blatantly refers to the "emancipatory potential of Communism" reveals his personal moral conundrum: He wants the film to rage and rant about the Stasi terror, while still believing in his heart, as many still do, that eventually "true" Communism would triumph.

Why do so many leftists write reviews bemoaning the fact that the director of the film didn't make the

though a majority of its current members work outside the telecom sector. So, for example, members of The Newspaper Guild-CWA, who provide Internet content, may be expected to have much stronger feelings on behalf of net neutrality than the traditional telecom workers whose jobs are tied more directly to the pipeline itself. But there is little to no discussion of this dichotomy of views within

rights is itself a socially useful goal"—not only ducks the core issue of democratic media but is the same warmed-over hash served by every union that opposes progressive changes that might result in job dislocation, from Teamsters pushing for Arctic Circle oil drilling to autoworkers resisting higher mileage standards. These are false dichotomies, but powerfully paralyzing nonetheless—if we allow ourselves to be trapped by them. Speed matters, yes; net neutrality matters more.

Andy Zipser,
Editor, *The Guild Reporter*
Washington, D.C.

Your June cover was a capitulation to the corrosive ideas that citizens are to be appealed to as consumers and that image matters more than substance.

film they thought he should have made?

This film isn't a documentary, nor a representation of history. It is a work of art, not the rhetorical agitprop the reviewer apparently prefers, and indeed exactly what the Communists themselves produced in their culture.

Lorna Salzman
Via e-mail

Net myopia

I deeply respect my colleague Steve Early and usually agree with his analyses, but his June letter responding to Brian Cook's "Not Neutrality" (April 2007) is disturbingly myopic.

The fact is, the CWA is schizophrenic about this business of the Internet, as may be expected for a union whose views are largely shaped by its telephone-worker antecedents, even

CWA, which—like most organizations—attempts to present a united front when dealing with the outside world. That isn't to say that speed doesn't matter—it just shouldn't prevail over democratic access, without which we'll simply end up with yet another corporate-controlled oligopoly.

In that respect, it's disturbing to me to read the CWA's Debbie Goldman embrace a corporate business model as a rationale for CWA's position, in what seems like yet another misguided effort at creating a capital-labor "partnership" in which everyone's a winner. As if.

Similarly, Early's defense of CWA's unbalanced approach by playing the jobs card—"I believe preserving jobs with decent wages, defined benefit pensions, fully-paid medical coverage and collective bargaining

Hello, I'm a pushover

I read June's cover story ("Hello, I'm a Democrat") and I could relate to it, as I worked my tail off (from my wheelchair) to get Ned Lamont elected.

But talk about bad timing. The day after the Democrats capitulated and gave Bush everything he wanted—no timelines and all the money he wanted for Iraq—I received *In These Times* with the headline "Hello, I'm a Democrat." I was so angry when I saw those words! When is the Party going to grow a spine? I have scoliosis and my back is straighter and stronger, then these so-called Democratic leaders, for God's sake!

Tom Wieliczka
Windsor Locks, Conn.

I just received the June 2007 issue and was struck by the strangely apt, underlying logic of the cover

contributors

image. I was stunned by the idea that branding the Democratic Party as the “Apple” of the political world was in any way positive. I get what you were trying to convey—Democrats are hip, young, innovative, and “think different”—but instead you inadvertently captured a deeper truth: that the branding and packaging of political parties (especially for the baldly apparent purpose of demographic appeals) is indistinguishable from the corporate branding and packaging of products. “Think Different, just like all these other people! By buying this product ...” It’s a capitulation to the corrosive ideas that voters and citizens are to be appealed to as consumers, and that image matters as much as substance.

Brian Awehali
Oakland, Calif.

CORRECTIONS

“Curiosity and a Cat Named Studs” (June 2007) mistakenly reported that *Touch and Go* is Terkel’s first memoir. The first was, *Talking To Myself: A Memoir of My Times*, published in 1973.

In “The Talented Mr. Griffin” (May 2007), the sentence discussing Monica Goodling’s e-mail to Kyle Sampson should have read, “In an Aug. 24 e-mail that the Justice Department’s Monica Goodling wrote to Sampson, she attached an article that noted Griffin’s nomination would face opposition in Congress because he was involved ‘in massive Republican projects in Florida and elsewhere by which Republicans challenged tens of thousand of absentee votes. Coincidentally, many of those challenged votes were in black precincts.’”



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Plan B: Wouldn't it be nice if military servicewomen were able to have one?

Democrats Shy Away From Emergency Contraception

BY BECCA GOLUBOCK WATSON

ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, advocates were optimistic that legislation requiring emergency contraception to be stocked on all military bases would pass in the House. "We had the votes on Wednesday night. Things were looking good," says Monica Castellanos, press secretary for Rep. Michael Michaud (D-Maine), one of the lead co-sponsors of the amendment that was scheduled for a vote the next day. But then, something mysterious happened.

For reasons that remain unclear, Michaud withdrew the legislation the next morning. According to Castellanos, it was purely a logistical snafu: "Key supporters had to be in their districts." But sources close to the issue tell a different story: The legislation, an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, with bipartisan support, was dropped by a Democratic leadership unwilling to go to bat for pro-choice issues. Despite Michaud's con-

fidence that the votes were there, Democratic leadership wasn't so sure, and they didn't want to hang around long enough to find out. The legislation might not have sunk, but they jumped ship anyway.

Emergency contraception, also known as Plan B or the morning-after pill, is available over-the-counter in all 50 states, but women in the U.S. military cannot count on accessing the medication on military bases. A 2003 survey financed by the Defense Department found that almost a third of military women reported being the victim of rape or attempted rape during their tenure in the military. Yet in return for their service, servicewomen are denied access to basic health care. "The situation is unconscionable," says Vicki Saporta, president of the Abortion Federation of America. "If you are a military woman in Iraq, and you are raped, it is this country's obligation to make sure you have access to emergency contraception."

Apparently, the Department of De-

fense agrees. In April 2002, it added emergency contraception to its Basic Care Formulary, a list of 214 medications required to be stocked at all military treatment facilities. (The list includes Levitra, a medication that treats erectile dysfunction.) But one month later, the medication was quietly removed in direct response to pressure from the Bush administration. "The Defense Department agreed that it should be available—certainly, this is an issue we should have been able to win," Saporta says.

For the past three congressional sessions, Michaud has worked to bring the medication back onto the Formulary. Michaud believes access to emergency contraception is a "major public health issue," a "fair, common-sense step that everyone should be able to agree on." After all of his work, it appeared that this was the legislation's shining moment. "We've introduced three bills so far for emergency contraception, but in this Congress, it looked most probable that we would [succeed]," Castellanos says. Reproductive rights advocates say that the amendment presented a critical opportunity for Democrats to break from Congress' conservative stance on choice. "This was the moment that Congress could signal that [they] were going to do business differently," says Kirsten Moore, president of Reproductive Health Technologies Project.

Many women in the military rely on military treatment facilities for all of their health needs, and don't always have access to basic care such as testing for pregnancy and STIs. Furthermore, they are only allowed to have abortions if they are the victims of sexual assault and are willing to report the assault.

In 2004 testimony to the Congressional Women's Caucus, servicewomen who were sexually assaulted reported that they received faulty follow-up care after an abortion. Laurie (the women's full names were not given), a sergeant in the Army returning from Afghanistan, testified that after her sexual assault by a coalition soldier, she was given "a lot of antibiotics, rather than emergency contraception" or testing for STDs or HIV. Beth, a major in the Army Reserves, served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and was sexually assaulted by a noncommis-

sioned officer. She testified that she was given "a lot of [birth control] pills to take" instead of emergency contraception.

What's most frustrating is that Congress has been paying more attention to the need to provide military men and women with better health care. The new budget for the Veterans Affairs Administration includes the largest single increase in veterans' health care funding in history. On May 23, the House passed a group of bills to improve the care and screening processes of potential brain injuries for veterans, extend health care for combat veterans and improve outreach programs. Many of the female veterans who benefit from these new programs, however, will still suffer from a lack of reproductive health care while in the service.

The amendment's disappearance is an ill wind. "You look at the vote, or the lack of the vote, and it sends a chill down the spines of reproductive rights advocates," Moore says. "These votes can be controversial. We understand that there can be political heat. But the more we run away from these votes, the more momentum we give to our opposition." ■

Militarizing Mexico's Drug War

NOCUPÉTARO, MEXICO—"IN THE HELICOPTER is where they began to beat us," recalls Sara, a 17-year-old who was released on May 16 after a week in military detention. (Her name has been changed to protect her identity.)

"They threw me really hard into the helicopter," she says. "They kicked me all over my body. Then one got on top of me; I could hear the other girls screaming. The soldiers said that this would take the whore out of us, that we were going to hell, that they were the law."

Seven months ago, President Felipe Calderón of the conservative National Action Party took office and declared war on drug traffickers, ordering 20,000 troops into the streets to put an end to drug-cartel related murders. Despite the troops, the number of drug-related murders has tripled and the army's massive deployment has yielded tales of widespread human rights violations, like that of Sara.

More than 1,000 people, mostly police officers, soldiers and members of enemy cartels, have been killed since Jan. 1. In Veracruz, elite armed gangs linked to the Gulf Cartel planted a decapitated head outside an army barracks with a note: "We're going to keep going when the federal forces get here." In Tabasco, men in a Jeep Cherokee delivered a refrigerator to the front door of the newspaper *Tabasco Hoy*; inside security agents found the severed head of a city councilman.

Drug trafficking across the Mexico-United States border exploded in the '80s in the wake of U.S. moves to quash traffickers from Colombia and the Caribbean. Since the '90s, drug traffickers have moved an estimated \$10 billion worth of cocaine, marijuana, heroin and methamphetamines across the border each year. As much as 70 percent of the cocaine that enters the United States crosses the border from Mexico. Drug-related violence between warring cartels has plagued the borderlands for years, increasing in the '90s and then exploding in the last two years.

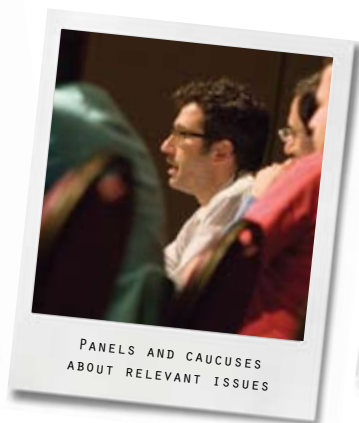
Three thousand people died of drug-related violence during the six-year

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NETWORKING FOR CHANGE

While nonprofits and politicians have found homes on flashy, youth-oriented social networking websites like MySpace and Facebook, independent upstart sites have taken the partnership of politics and social networking one step further.

By appealing to and connecting passionate, socially conscious individuals, sites like Change.org have created networks of people actively engaging with the issues and organizations that matter most to them. Featuring causes ranging from "End the Crisis in Darfur" to "Protect Free Speech," Change.org connects individuals from all walks of life, and provides them with the information and opportunities to act on their convictions.

Founder Ben Rattray first imagined a site like Change.org in the summer of 2005 as a way to translate passion for a cause into effective action. With the help of friends, Rattray launched Change.org in February.

Once registered on this free website, users are able to search for and join "changes," causes they care about. Each "change" includes a forum for news and discussion, and links to recommended nonprofits and politicians involved with that issue. Users are then able to coordinate donations to nonprofits or political campaigns by nominating and voting to maximize influence. Finally, users are encouraged to take action by posting information on volunteer opportunities, events and campaigns.

To learn more, visit www.change.org.

— Katharine Goktuna



reign of former President Vicente Fox. Last year, more than 20 police officers and rival gang members were beheaded, and their heads were often put on public display in harrowing fashion. In Acapulco, two police officers' heads were posted on the fence outside a state government building above a poster-board sign that read: "So that you learn some respect." In Michoacán, assassins stepped into a crowded nightclub and rolled five severed heads onto the dance floor.

The army roundup that detained Sara M. started with a shoot out on May 1 between soldiers and members of a cartel gang, who were driving down the only paved road in Carácuaro, Michoacán. When a group of soldiers in civilian clothes apparently backed into the gang members' truck, a minor fender bender erupted into a fierce 20-minute gun battle. Locals ran for cover and the town police stayed indoors, thinking that the gunfight was between two rival gangs. Five soldiers, including a colonel, died and three more were wounded. The gang members escaped, leaving behind one dead.

Within hours, the army mobilized more than 1,000 soldiers to comb the Tierra Caliente region of Michoacán and look for the gang members. The army raided houses in Carácuaro, neighboring Nocupétaro, and surrounding villages. Soldiers beat, detained and tortured dozens of farmers who had the misfortune of sharing the same last name as the dead gang member. Mexico's National Human Rights Commission gathered more than 50 complaints of human-rights violations during the army's operation around Carácuaro.

Soldiers took Sara, a 17-year-old friend and 32-year-old Carmela Martínez from Martínez's house. Soldiers also detained two waitresses, ages 16 and 17, from a nearby restaurant owned by Martínez. They were all hooded, with their hands tied behind their backs, on the floor of the military helicopter when the soldiers began to undress them.

"They kicked me, they bound my hands so tight that my blood could barely circulate. That day a friend and me were wearing miniskirts, and they raised them up, they lowered our underwear and they were touching us," Sara says.

Two of the girls told members of the Human Rights Commission that during the helicopter ride, after being threatened, beaten and molested, the soldiers placed warm rags over their mouths



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN GIBLER

Sara was caught in the crossfire of Mexico's increasingly violent drug war

that caused them to lose consciousness. One girl awoke with vaginal pain and bleeding.

Police with close connections to the army said that Sara and her friends were "connected to the Zetas," a gang connected to the Gulf Cartel. One police official told the Mexican national newspaper, *El Milenio*: "No, look, these girls even have kids and like to party. I don't think the soldiers raped them; I'm sure they just grabbed them in a few places, just a couple of touches here and there, but no rape, they were even ugly."

Sara says she didn't know anything about the Zetas and the recent clash between soldiers and a drug gang. She had just come to visit from Cuernavaca and was set to leave the next day.

Now, Sara does not know where to go. Her husband sounds distant on the phone, she says, and she doesn't know if he will allow her to go back home. Moreover, one thing the soldiers told her has consistently haunted her: "They said that if the Zetas don't kill me then they will."

On May 23, the Mexican Congress passed a resolution urging Calderón to professionalize and train the federal police forces so as to avoid using the army to fight drug traffickers. The resolution noted that the army's involvement has "taken on a Messianic dimension." But the following day Calderón said he had no intention of backing down.

Neither do the cartels. The following weekend, drug-related assassins killed 20 people in eight different states across the country.

—John Gibler

D.C. Fights for a Vote

THE LINE TO enter the May 23 Senate Judiciary Committee session stretched well down the hallway. Packed inside were activists wearing stickers and t-shirts emblazoned with the image that has become their movement's trademark: a D.C. license plate bearing the wry motto: "Taxation without representation." Sens. Pat Leahy (D-Vt.), Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) presided over a pleasant, if at times contentious, three-hour discussion of the bill that would give the District of Columbia—and its population of 581,530 residents (more than Wyoming)—a full voting representative in the U.S. House.

The bill has attained a measure of bipartisan support by coupling the representative for heavily Democratic D.C. with an additional one for heavily Republican Utah. Passed by the House on April 19, it was scheduled for mark-up in the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs as *In These Times* went to press. But some prominent Republicans like Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and the White House, in a March 20 statement of administration policy, have come out against the bill, arguing that it is unconstitutional because the Constitution stipulates that representatives shall come from "the several states," of which D.C. is not one.

Utah fell just a few hundred residents short of adding a fourth member to its congressional delegation after the last census—unfairly, it contends, because more than 10,000 young Mormon missionaries who were temporarily abroad were not counted as residents. That explains Sen. Hatch's interest in seeing this bill passed, though he was careful to add, "This bill should not be seen as a step toward either statehood or Senate representation for the District of Columbia."

One audience member, Lars Hydle, a retired Foreign Service officer and member of the Washington, D.C., Republican Committee, explained that D.C. Republicans fully support the bill. Asked why so many national Republicans do not, he admitted, "For partisan reasons; too many Democrats and not enough Republicans in D.C. The same reason so many Democrats support it."

The hearing's turnout was just one

manifestation of the extremely effective campaign that its supporters, led by the nonprofit DC Vote, have waged.

DC Vote was founded in 1998, as a court case demanding representation for D.C. under the equal protection clause of the Constitution, *Alexander v. Daley*, was winding its way through the courts. In 2000, a federal court held by a 2 to 1 majority that it could not force Congress to add a member from D.C. When the Supreme Court declined to intervene, that insured only legislative action will grant representation for D.C.

DC Vote has eschewed the more extreme position of opponents of the bill, such as George Washington University Law Professor Jonathan Turley, who argue that statehood is the only option. "Statehood is a step beyond our mission," says Kevin Paul Kiger, DC Vote's communications director. "But having a seat at the table where statehood is decided is a step in the right direction." Kiger can quickly run down the myriad indignities that D.C. suffers at the hands of the federal government (which has the power to determine how D.C. is allowed to spend its own tax revenue), such as congressional efforts to undermine D.C.'s restrictive gun laws.

With only seven paid staffers, DC Vote has managed major gains on an issue that has bedeviled activists for more than 200 years. A 2005 poll, commissioned by DC Vote, found, "Just over 80 percent of American adults are not aware that D.C. does not have equal constitutional rights, including voting rights in Congress." The poll also found that precisely the same percentage support giving D.C. voting rights once the issue is explained to them. DC Vote has raised awareness through free media like the license plates and putting the "taxation" motto on RFK Stadium.

They have also worked hard at building support locally and nationally. DC Vote's list of national partners includes not just major civil rights organizations like the NAACP and good government groups like Common Cause, but the Union for Reform Judaism and the United Auto Workers. On the local level, they've brought on business organizations like the Greater Washington Board of Trade and the local chapter of the Log Cabin Republicans. Representatives of all these constituencies were out in force at the DC Vote march and rally on the National Mall on April 16. The rally, according to Kiger, was an essential catalyst that got the bill passed in the

House a few days later.

Kiger is confident that President Bush will sign the law should it pass the Senate, even though his administration dispatched a Justice Department official to testify against the bill at the hearing. "[Bush] is not going to go down in history as being the president who vetoed a piece of legislation that would bring democracy to 600,000 Americans while he's spending trillions of dollars and thousands of lives fighting for democracy in Iraq."

—Ben Adler



COURTESY OF CHELSEA ROSS

The Parson's Casket Hardware Superfund site in Belvedere, Ill.

The Not-So Superfund

ABOUT 40 MILES north of Chicago, in Waukegan, Ill., a parcel of land sits between the Waukegan Harbor and the shore of Lake Michigan. Known as the Outboard Marine Corp. Superfund site, it's where multiple companies—including General Motors, North Shore Gas and the Outboard Marine Corp.—dumped toxic waste for nearly a century. Although it's been a superfund site for more than 20 years, much work remains to be done.

According to "Wasting Away," a report published in April by the Center for Public Integrity (CPI), a D.C.-based public interest group, the Outboard Marine site is not alone. CPI found that under the Bush administration, the rate of Superfund site cleanup has been dramatically slower due to diminished funding. "Cleanup work was started at about 145

sites in the past six years," it reads, "while the startup rate was nearly three times as high for the previous six years."

In 1980, Congress passed the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act to make companies liable for pollution cleanup costs. The program, and its 1,304 designated sites, became commonly known as Superfund, after the large trust fund that held the taxes levied on polluting companies. This "super" fund helped pay for cleanups at orphan sites, those where potentially responsible parties either would not, or simply could not, pay.

"Superfund has always gone after companies that caused contamination," says Bill Muno, who managed Superfund for the Great Lakes Region from 1995 to 2005. "But there used to be a surplus of money to pay for sites where companies were recalcitrant or bankrupt."

However, in 1995, the Republican Congress refused to reauthorize the tax when it expired, and by 2003 the trust fund had evaporated. With the tax in place, 75 percent of funding came from polluter taxes and 25 percent came from government appropriations. Congress now appropri-

ates 100 percent of general funds.

While the actual amount allocated to the program has varied little, Superfund has lost 35 percent of its funds due to inflation, which, according to Muno, has had a serious impact.

"When I was in the program, if we needed money, we would go to the fund and it was there," says Muno. "Now there's a backlog of projects that need money that outweighs what Congress appropriates."

Mick Hans, who took over Muno's position at the EPA, says that the rate of progress has slowed because "we took care of the low-hanging fruit first. The sites that are left are more complex and take longer to clean."

Muno disagrees. "In the old days, we dealt with immediate threat and residual waste all at once. Now it takes much longer and often the EPA won't fund the entire cleanup at once—they'll just do a partial cleanups."

That's what happened at the Parson's Casket Hardware site in Belvedere, Ill. A portion of the contaminated soil was removed in 1984, but rusty drums and tanks still sit in what is now a fenced-in field of tall grass and wildflowers. The groundwa-

ter is still contaminated, but since it does not infiltrate the community's drinking water, the Parson's site isn't high on the list of cleanup priorities. It could take years to receive funds from Superfund.

In Waukegan, city and state officials aren't waiting for Superfund to pay for the cleanup. Instead, they are working to secure a grant from an unrelated EPA program. But Waukegan's situation is rare—most sites don't have other options.

In 2004 and 2005, the EPA requested \$150 million increases in the Superfund budget, but "Congress did not have any interest in increasing the funding," says Betsy Sutherland, Superfund's director of assessment and remediation.

Muno points to the amount of federal funding going to the Department of Defense to explain Congress' budgeting decisions.

"What would help Superfund the most" says Muno, "would be to reinstate a corporate environmental tax, so some outside funds would contribute to the costs, but that's not likely to happen under this administration."

—Chelsea Ross

appall-o-meter

2.3 Deport the Chalupa

As the GOP hopefuls convened in New Hampshire for their third debate, Colorado Rep. Tom Tancredo set a high bar for subtlety. According to *The Swamp*, a blog operated by the *Chicago Tribune*, Tancredo dropped in at the same diner where adversary John McCain happened to be having lunch. Seeing an opportunity to highlight his opposition to the McCain-sponsored immigration bill now in Congress, Tancredo ordered a treat to be sent over to McCain's table: some nachos.

2.7 Imagined Communities

For those of you who think anti-immigrant hysteria is the special preserve of cranky white men, consider the California-based Vietnamese for Fair Immigration. The group has done all sorts of public outreach, sponsored candidates and even put up a billboard in Berkeley that blared, "No racist amnesty."

It turns out, however, that the group's spokesman and cofounder, who identifies himself as Tim Binh, is in fact a cranky white man named Tim Brummer. Confronted by the *Oakland Tribune*, Brummer

argued that, though white, he eats lots of Vietnamese food and is half-Vietnamese "in my mind." Anyway, he explained, the whole name thing was his wife's idea.

9.4 Outside the Box Torture

"At every point, there was part of me resisting, part of me enjoying. Using dogs on someone, there was a tingling throughout my body. If you saw the reaction in the prisoner, it's thrilling." That's how ex-military intelligence specialist Tony Lagouranis described his stint in Iraq's notorious Abu Ghraib prison to the *Washington Post*.

Lagouranis, who recounts these experiences in a new book, *Fear Up Harsh*, told the *Post* he knew he'd gone off the deep end when he perused Viktor Frankel's Holocaust memoir for pointers on Nazi torture techniques.

"I couldn't make sense of the moral system" in Iraq, he told the *Post*. "I couldn't figure out what was right and wrong. There were no rules. They liter-



ally said, 'Be creative.'"

One way he got creative: He blared a parody skit by comedians Ben Stiller and Janeane Garofalo at prisoners confined to a metal shipping container. "They hated it," Lagouranis said. "Like, 'Please! Just stop that voice!'"

1.4 Design with Impact

A design competition for London's 2012 Olympic logo yielded, not surprisingly, a hideous result. That's what design competitions are supposed to do. Nobody predicted, however, that the nifty video produced to unleash the logo on the public would have such an ... impact.

The video was yanked after Olympic officials received panicked warnings by Epilepsy Action. Within hours of release, reports the *Sun*, at least a dozen Britons had collapsed after watching the flickering animation.

—Dave Mulcahey

The Plight of New Orleans Workers

MORE THAN HALF of New Orleans workers have been victims of labor abuse, according to a new report from Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ), a nonprofit that mobilizes U.S. religious communities on workers' rights. Despite these frequent violations of labor law, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) concluded 37 percent fewer wage and hour investigations last year than in the previous year.

"Working On Faith: A Faithful Response to Worker Abuse in New Orleans" analyzes IWJ's 2006 surveys and interviews with 218 workers in a variety of jobs from construction to retail to bank tellers. According to the report, workers have experienced abuses including wage theft (47 percent), exposure to dangerous substances at work (58 percent), being unfairly fired or disciplined (42 percent) and discrimination (29 percent).

"New Orleans is a case of extremes, [showing] what happened when everything failed," says Ted Smukler, public policy director at IWJ and principal author of "Working on Faith."

The report identifies several 2005 Bush administration decisions that particularly hurt workers. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) August 31 suspension of health and safety standard enforcement, though reversed in most areas after five months of workers handling and inhaling mold, asbestos and other toxins, continued in seven parishes in and around New Orleans. On Sept. 6, 2005, the Department of Homeland Security suspended employers requiring to check immigration documentation (but not employees requiring to have documentation). This enabled employers to hire undocumented immigrants and then call in immigration authorities on payday to avoid paying workers. The wages being kept from workers were not as significant as they might have been, however, because of a Sept. 8, 2005 presidential proclamation suspending the requirement that private contractors receiving federal dollars pay at least the prevailing industry wage.

The report notes that these post-Katrina changes are only the latest example of a long-term decline in DOL's investigative and enforcement capacity. But according to Smukler, until the current Bush ad-

snapshot



HEBRON—A Palestinian man sits on the ground as an Israeli soldier gestures for him to move on during a June 1 rally by farmers on the edge of the West Bank village of Bani Naaim against the Jewish settlement of Bani Hever. Several mobile caravans have been set up this past year in this established settlement. (Photo by HAZEM BADER/AFP/Getty Images)

ministration, DOL officials would at least make unannounced visits to work sites independent of worker complaints. Now, their emphasis is solely on voluntary compliance by employers. The DOL's budget reflects this shift.

Unfortunately, this new reliance on workers to help enforce labor law is not effectively coupled with publicity about worker rights or DOL services. In IWJ's survey, not one worker mentioned the DOL as either the source of information about what to do if abused at work or as an agency at which one could file complaints. Not surprisingly, almost no workers (a mere 0.5 percent) filed any complaints about labor abuses.

Even when workers do try to file complaints, they may not receive adequate help. Mary Bauer, director of the Immigrant Justice Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center, says, "From our experiences, the resources [the DOL] devoted just weren't that good. It was hard to reach people, their language capacity was poor, and they didn't track the cases when they had them."

In the year after Katrina, the Department of Labor completed only 44 wage and hour investigations on behalf of the thousands

of workers in New Orleans. "Every worker that we talk to still has been cheated out of wages or not paid," says Bauer. Additionally, says Smukler, "If employers do get caught, they only have to pay back wages [without interest, fines or penalties]."

In its Dec. 7, 2005 report, the U.S. Government Accountability Office called for a review of OSHA's strategy to protect workers' safety. Now, after several Congress staffers have read *Working on Faith*, Congress is listening. For the first time that Smukler can remember, Congress has committed to hold hearings on the DOL. The Senate Subcommittee on employment and workplace safety, chaired by Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), has scheduled a hearing on issues with labor law enforcement on June 19, and the Domestic Policy Subcommittee of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, chaired by Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), plans to hold a hearing on labor abuses in New Orleans in July. The hearings are not likely to help the workers already harmed by labor law violations. But, as Bauer says, "It's certainly not too late to do better in the future."

—Rachel Metz

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

The Enduring Lies of Ronald Reagan



RONALD REAGAN WAS a saint, a commanding leader, the gold standard of principled conservatism against whom all current and future Republicans should be measured. This is the new mantra coming out of the Republican race for the presidency as the current crop of candidates scramble, quite understandably, to distance themselves from the walking disaster that is George W. Bush.

In the Fox News-hosted “debate” among the Republican hopefuls, Ron Paul, Rudi Giuliani and others were quick to wrap themselves in the Reagan mantle. When Fred Thompson—actor turned politician—entered the race, he evoked huge sighs of relief among Republicans, who see him as the one best able to recapture the Gipper’s magic. Coincidentally, Reagan’s diaries, edited by Douglas Brinkley, have just been published and also seek to cast him as “a true American leader”.

While much of the neocon agenda is in tatters right now, certainly one of its most successful achievements has been the canonization of Ronald Reagan, which rests crucially on one thing Reagan himself did so well: forgetting the facts. So it’s time to exhume a few.

First to go is the myth that Reagan was the most popular president since FDR. Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting reminds us, “During the first two years of Reagan’s presidency, the public was giving President Reagan the lowest level of approval of all modern elected presidents. Reagan’s average first-year approval rating was 58 percent—lower than Dwight Eisenhower’s 69 percent, Jack Kennedy’s 75 percent, Richard Nixon’s 61 percent and Jimmy Carter’s 62 percent.” At the end of his second year, (remember the Reagan recession?) Reagan’s approval rating was 41 percent; after the Iran-Contra scandal was revealed, Reagan’s approval rating stood at 46 percent. His approval rating for his entire presidency was lower than Kennedy’s, Eisenhower’s and even Johnson’s, and at times he was one of the most unpopular presidents in recent history.

Also forgotten is Reagan’s own embarrassing propensity to just make things up. Reagan was a dunce and a fabricator. One of his most famous assertions was, “Trees cause more pollution than automobiles do,” and he maintained, wrongly, that sulfur dioxide emitted from Mount St. Helens was greater than that emitted by cars over a 10-year period. (In one day, cars emit 40 times what Mount St. Helens released in a day even at its peak activity.) In 1985, Reagan

praised the P.W. Botha’s apartheid regime of South Africa for eliminating segregation, a blunder then-Press Secretary Larry Speakes had to correct a few days later.

Other examples abound: During a 1983 Congressional Medal of Honor ceremony Reagan told a story about military heroism that *New York Daily News* columnist Lars-Erik Nelson wrote never happened. Nelson had checked the citations on all 434 Congressional Medals of Honor awarded during WWII. The scene Reagan described did appear, however, in the 1944 film *A Wing and a Prayer*. Larry Speakes’ response? “If you tell the same story five times, it’s true.”

And let’s not forget the wages of “trickle down” economics and “Reaganomics,” from which we have still not recovered. In 1982, the Congressional Budget Office found that taxpayers earning under \$10,000 lost an average of \$240

from Reagan’s 1981 tax cuts, while those earning more than \$80,000 gained an average of \$15,130. By that fall, the jobless rate hit 10.1 percent—the worst in 42 years, and a year later 11.9 million were out of work.

In 1983, the country’s poverty rate rose to 15 percent, the highest level since the mid-’60s. In 1984, a congressional study reported that cuts in welfare had pushed more than 500,000 people—the majority of them children—into poverty. Then-Attorney General Ed Meese’s response? “I don’t know of any authoritative figures that there are hungry children ... people go to soup kitchens because the food is free and that’s easier than paying for it.”

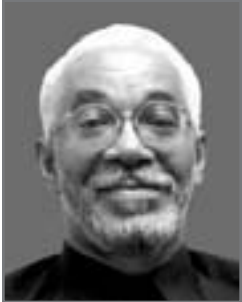
The neocons would have us believe that Reagan was also a foreign policy genius. Space prevents me from detailing his administration’s adventures and blunders in Grenada, in Beirut and the visit to the Nazi cemetery in Bitburg. So let’s just remember aid to the Nicaraguan Contras, whom Reagan likened to the Founding Fathers, and the revelation that the CIA had produced a manual that taught them, in part, how to kidnap and “neutralize” government officials. Iran-Contra—the secret and illegal selling of weapons to our sworn enemy, Iran, to then fund the Contras—was both a constitutional disaster and a foreign policy blunder about which we were asked to believe Reagan knew nothing. His administration was also thoroughly corrupt: Eight senior officials in his administration were indicted.

Fabrication, lying, cruel and counterproductive policies at home and abroad, bloating of the deficit, widening the gap between rich and poor: These are the Reagan legacy. As Republican candidates seek to wear his mantle, their Democratic opponents need to remind Americans exactly what they are putting on. ■

The canonization of Ronald Reagan rests crucially on one thing Reagan himself did well: forgetting the facts. It seems timely to exhume a few.

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

Entrapping Inflated Threats



ABDUL KADIR, ONE of the four men charged in an alleged terrorist plot to blow up a pipeline that fed fuel tanks at John F. Kennedy International Airport, is a former member of the Guyanese Parliament and former mayor of Linden, Guyana. The fuel line the group allegedly planned to sabotage originates in Linden, N.J. This Linden-Linden axis heavily implicates Kadir.

I am being facetious of course. However, had law enforcement officials made this connection during their announcement of the plot in early June, there is little doubt the national media would have incredulously reported it as a credible link.

In fact, the actual announcement was just marginally more credible. "Had the plot been carried out, it could have resulted in unfathomable damage, deaths and destruction," Roslynn R. Mauskopf, the U.S. attorney in Brooklyn, said after the news conference detailing the failed plot.

But many security experts doubt the planned attack could have produced the catastrophic consequences presented so dramatically at the press conference. Even the *New York Times* downplayed the news two days later with the headline "Papers Portray Plot as More Talk Than Action."

The Department of Justice complaint charges Kadir, Russell Defreitas, Kareem Ibrahim, Abdel Nur and unnamed others, with conspiring to "deliver, place, discharge and detonate an explosive device in, into and against a public transportation system, to wit: John F. Kennedy International Airport." The alleged ringleader of the plot was Defreitas, a 63-year-old native of Guyana who has been a U.S. citizen since the '60s. Nur also is Guyanese and Ibrahim is from Trinidad.

But law enforcement officials admit Defreitas was nowhere near capable of mounting such an attack. He is a retired JFK cargo worker who had neither the financial wherewithal, the equipment nor an executable plan. Mark J. Mershon, assistant director in charge of the FBI's New York office, said, "the ambitions were horrific, the capacities were very limited, but they kept trying."

Mershon's statements bring to mind the words of FBI Deputy Director John Pistole, who declared during an equally dramatic news conference in June 2006 in Miami that a terrorist plot to blow up Chicago's Sears Tower "was more aspirational than operational." Pistole was referring to the arrest of seven men of Haitian descent charged with

conspiring to destroy several buildings, including Sears Tower, by use of explosives.

In fact, there are many other similarities between the two cases. Undercover informants in criminal jeopardy initiated both cases. In the Miami case, the informant was a Middle Eastern native seeking U.S. residential status by aiding the FBI. In the current case, the informant reportedly is a convicted drug dealer whose sentence, according to the complaint, "is pending as part of his cooperation agreement with the government." In both cases, the undercover informants supplied much of the money and equipment to conduct the so-called surveillance of potential terrorist targets.

The informants also supplied some of the plans for the attacks, as none of the participants in either the Sears Tower or JFK Airport plots had experience in terrorist activities,

or any relevant military training. In some instances, the informants acted more as agent provocateurs than accomplices. The Miami informant suggested targets and supplied videotaping equipment, according to the Sept. 6, 2006,

Washington Post. In New York, the informant ("the source") also provided cash, videotaping equipment and transportation, according to the DOJ complaint.

These extenuating circumstances are drowned out by the chest-thumping rhetoric of law enforcement officials eager to make a splash about their success in the "war on terror." The possibility that the informants were seeking governmental favor by inflating the plots and entrapping the men has likewise been downplayed in the national media, even though the likelihood seems quite plausible.

Of course, perhaps the government is truly disrupting potentially catastrophic terrorist plots. To be sure, the Bush administration's foreign policy is provoking the kind of global anger that motivates terrorists to attack the United States. As GOP presidential candidate Ron Paul notes, they attacked us for a reason. "We need to look at what we do from the perspective of what would happen if somebody else did it to us."

There's no doubt that attacks are best thwarted by busting terrorists' plans at their incipient stages. Moreover, rigorous police work and effective intelligence sharing seem to be more effective at combating the terrorist threat than bombastic rhetoric and a bombs-laden foreign policy.

But the various terrorist "plots" exposed by the Bush administration so far have been notable for their lack of credible threat, the central role of a criminal informant and the strong whiff of political opportunism. ■

The national media has downplayed the possibility that the informants were seeking governmental favor by inflating plots and entrapping men.

BY H. CANDACE GORMAN

Torture by Another Name



ON MAY 15, America was treated to a televised celebration of war, torture and indefinite detention—the South Carolina Republican primary debate. Blending politics with Hollywood, moderator Brit Hume spun a hypothetical question involving the proverbial “ticking time-bomb” scenario. The candidates all tried to out-do each other over who could be trusted to best disregard fundamental constitutional principles. It was close, but

the award went to Mitt Romney who declared: “I’m glad they’re at Guantánamo. I don’t want them on our soil. I want them on Guantánamo, where they don’t get the access to lawyers [Mitt: *it is our soil and we lawyers are still there.*]

... My view is we ought to double Guantánamo ... And enhanced interrogation techniques have to be used.”

The media interpreted this spectacle as meat for the Republican base. But, they are far from the attitudes of the Red

State fringe. These views on torture have been outlined by the Bush administration’s so-called legal minds who on the one hand claim “we do not torture,” while the other hand is busy torturing ... under a new name. Or is it a new name? Those of us who thought the Bushies coined the phrase “enhanced interrogation techniques” forgot their lack of imagination. As Andrew Sullivan (blogger and reformed Bush supporter) has pointed out, the origins of the phrase can be traced to the German Gestapo. Sullivan reports that the phrase “Verschärfte Vernehmung” is German for “enhanced interrogation.”

When the Nazis first put pen to paper regarding “enhanced techniques” their primary aim was to not leave physical signs of torture. In Bush speak, this is referred to as a “softening” method. Rumsfeld outlined these approved techniques in the memos circulated in 2002 and 2003, that permit interrogation techniques aimed at breaking the individual down, including “environmental adjustment,” “sleep adjustment,” “stress positions,” and “isolation.”

But Rummy was not the first Bushie to turn to the Gestapo handbook. John Yoo (then with the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel, now a law professor at Berkeley) declared in a 2002 memo that prisoners in the “war on terror” did not enjoy the protections afforded to prisoners of war, because al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations were “non-state” actors. In that same timeframe, Jay S. Bybee, then Justice Department lawyer (now an appellate judge on the

Ninth Circuit) claimed that a prisoner’s treatment could be “cruel, inhumane or degrading, but still not produce pain and suffering of the requisite intensity to fall within [proscriptions on torture].” Bybee insisted that physical pain amounting to torture “must be equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death.”

Which leads us to Bush’s flunky Gonzales who heartily agreed with Yoo and Bybee, thereby securing the way for ever more “enhanced techniques”. In Gonzales’ memo to the President in 2002 he falsely concluded that language in the Geneva Conventions, specifically the prohibition on “outrages upon personal dignity” and “inhumane treatment,” were “undefined” and “difficult to interpret.” Thanks to these legal halfwits, the door to full-blown torture swung wide open,

inviting in the physical abuse, psychological injury, physical abuse and death that followed.

At the very time that these Nazi era ideas were gaining currency in the highest echelons of American government, Guantánamo’s first inmates were

arriving at Camp X-Ray, including my client Al-Ghizzawi. Al-Ghizzawi had absolutely no intelligence value (unless we needed to know the price and quality of Afghan honey). Nevertheless, he was subjected to the most brutal forms of torture. I can’t give you the details of Al-Ghizzawi’s abuse because he still will not talk directly about it. He alludes to the brutality and one day I am confident he will talk. (Perhaps in testimony at The Hague?) Softening techniques, including sleep disruption and environmental adjustment, were still being used on Al-Ghizzawi and others during my recent visits to the gulag. Similarly, prisoner isolation now has Al-Ghizzawi and hundreds of other prisoners in the stultifying confinement of a new “supermax” facility, Guantánamo’s Camps 5 and 6.

If justice comes to those who wait, then wait we will. This criminal saga has its silver lining. Those same Nazis who claimed it was acceptable in times of war to use stress positions, environmental adjustments, hypothermia, water boarding, long forced standing as well as claiming that a lack of uniform allows for the most brutal of “techniques,” were themselves found guilty of war crimes and sentenced to death. The clever men and women of the Bush regime, who thought they could legalize torture by calling it “enhanced interrogation techniques” will hopefully be taught this simple lesson: torture is torture and by any other name is still illegal. ■

H. CANDACE Gorman is a civil rights attorney in Chicago.

We who thought the Bushies coined ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ forgot their lack of imagination. The origin lies with the Nazis.

BY LAURA S. WASHINGTON

A GLBT Center of Their Own



IT'S "NOT YOUR average GLBT Center" declared the April 24 edition of *The Advocate*, the national GLBT news-magazine.

Indeed. The Center on Halsted, billed as the nation's most comprehensive GLBT community center, was unveiled last month in a flurry of local and national press. More than a decade of perspicacious planning and frenetic fundraising culminated in a 175,000-square-foot com-

plex on North Halsted Street, the main drag of Chicago's Boys Town. The city's first community center serving the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community is also the first of its kind in the nation.

The three-story, gleaming expanse of steel, glass and art deco style celebrates a coming-of-age for GLBTs in Chicago and beyond. It is also the fruit of a blend of hard-headed politics and progressive causes. Unlike its peers around the na-

tion, the non-profit community center will offer a dizzying array of programs and amenities: youth and mental health counseling, violence intervention, an HIV/AIDS hotline, culinary training, mentoring, legal assistance, a cyber center, a 175-seat theater and a basketball court.

Its star-studded list of supporters includes the singer Elton John, Billie Jean King of tennis fame, Art Smith (Oprah's chef) and celebrity designer Nate Berkus.

Even more notable is its political clout. Forty percent of the center's operational budget comes courtesy of the taxpayer. Can you say, "government funds"? As GLBTs gained traction in Chicago and nationwide for causes from equal rights to public accommodations, military service, civil unions and even marriage, the Center was building support among the politicians.

The concept had been simmering in GLBT circles for years. Then in 1999, activists snuggled up next to a strange bedfellow—Illinois Republican Gov. George Ryan, who backed a \$1.5-million state grant to build the Center. Once a staunchly conservative state lawmaker, Ryan was a fierce opponent of the Equal Rights Amendment. But in the '90s he wholeheartedly embraced gay causes in his bid for the governor's mansion. When Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley agreed in 2001 to donate \$3 million in city-owned property, the GLBT Center went from dream to reality.

In 2005, Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) engineered a \$1.25 million federal grant. "That is remarkable, during the

Bush administration" says Patrick M. Sheahan, an executive with the global finance firm UBS and chairman of the Center's capital campaign. Emanuel, the powerful Democratic leader and former aide to President Bill Clinton, lives near Boys Town.

The Center's coming of age paralleled the mainstreaming of the gay rights movement. Ten years ago, Chicago's annual Gay Pride Parade was dominated by floats overflowing with sweaty, gyrating men in thongs. Today it draws dozens of straight elected officials eager to strut their stuff alongside the drag queens and Dykes on Bikes.

The Center has dovetailed with another progressive movement that has gone mainstream: environmentalism. The new building claims plenty of bona fide "green" traits. Designed by the global architecture firm Gensler, it fronts

environmentally friendly features like a gray water system that collects and recycles water runoff from the roof, natural ventilation and electric resistance heating.

The all-green rooftop terrace was dedicated the Mayor's own Rooftop Garden. Daley, now in his sixth term, is an avid environmentalist who constructed an energy-saving garden atop Chicago's City Hall.

Without the largess of politicians, straight and gay, the Center would still be on the drawing board. It sits in the 44th ward, whose alderman, Tom Tunney, is openly gay.

The project also took some astute political spinning. The name "Center on Halsted" was more powerful for what it didn't say than for what it did. The neutral moniker provided a fig leaf for the conservative politicians they pitched.

While the Center is on the city's north side, where most "out" GLBTs live, its mission is to serve a wider constituency. That's one reason why officials cut a deal with Whole Foods Market, the national grocery chain, to rent the center's ground floor. The hefty rent will help support the non-profit's operations for years to come.

It's important to note that Whole Foods may not be quite down with the program just yet. Its website gushes that the new store was "inspired by the beautifully manicured streets of East Lakeview and by the diverse people who live, work and play within the community." Still, the promo contains no mention of the word "boy," not to mention "gay" or "GLBT". Oh, well.

Still, the new Center on Halsted is a coup, and the political log-rolling that brought it to Boys Town offers lessons for progressives of all stripes. ■

Chicago's Gay Pride Parade draws dozens of straight elected officials eager to strut their stuff alongside the drag queens and Dykes on Bikes.

Genetic Disorder

Parents with limited incomes are being denied access to genetic tests and the counseling that experts say should accompany them

BY DANA GOLDSTEIN

THE MAPPING OF THE human genome, first completed in 2000, vastly accelerated research into the genetic causes of human disease. But national health policy has not kept up with the science, and consequently many Americans lack the information they need to make an informed decision about whether to carry a pregnancy to term.

According to reproductive health, genetic and disability rights experts, high costs and lack of government regulation have put comprehensive genetic services out of reach for millions of Americans.

Those services include not only blood tests, sonograms and amniocentesis to screen for genetic abnormalities in fetuses, but also genetic counseling that can help expectant parents choose whether to test for genetic disorders. Genetic counselors say pregnant women should understand that genetic tests sometimes have high rates of false positives before they agree to undergo them.

“What we have here is a situation where low income women are being denied the genetic services that non-low income women have access to,” says Loretta Ross, national coordinator of SisterSong, a coalition of reproductive justice organizations focusing on women of color.

EACH YEAR, 40 percent of pregnant women—1.6 million—depend on Medicaid for their prenatal care. According to a 1999 report from the Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonpartisan health policy research institution, Medicaid plans in 46 states and the District of Columbia cover some prenatal genetic services, usually second trimester screening for genetic variations such as Down syndrome, spina bifida and cystic fibrosis. At the time of the survey, the most recent to date, 36 states and the District of Columbia covered genetic counseling, but usually only after test results indicated increased risk for genetic abnormalities. Medicaid reimburse-



“Increasing the workforce of people who specialize in genetics and are able to get out to those rural areas is very, very important.”

JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

ment rates for genetic services are low, and costs for families dependent on low-wage jobs or public assistance can be prohibitive. Genetic counselors laud a California program that guarantees second trimester genetic screening through a blood test for every pregnant woman in the state. But the test costs \$162 and 27 percent of eligible Californians chose not to participate. And California, like most states, doesn't provide access to genetic counseling unless a test result is abnormal. “The goal of a counseling session is to realize that if you do the test, it takes you down a certain path,” says Cathy Wicklund, president of the National Society of Genetic Counselors. “There are a lot of people who regret that they ever did that test in the first place because of the anxiety. What we advocate is education before you jump into something.”

The high cost and incomplete nature of Medicaid coverage for genetic services is partly due to a lack of regulation of genetic specialists. The American Board of Genet-

ic Counselors has certified only 3,000 genetic counselors, who are first required to earn a master's degree in genetic counseling. But because the federal government does not recognize genetic counselors as official medical “service providers,” in most states, they cannot bill Medicaid directly for their services.

“Sometimes genetic tests are only available in one specialized center outside your state, but your state Medicaid program only covers in-state procedures,” says Wicklund. “Increasing the workforce of people who specialize in genetics and are able to get out to those rural areas is very, very important. And language barriers are another issue. We need to increase the diversity within our own profession.”

COMPLICATING MATTERS, IN January the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommended a new screening method that enables expectant parents to learn as

early as the first trimester whether their fetus is at increased risk for Down syndrome. Previously, only pregnant women 35 and over were encouraged to undergo amniocentesis to diagnose Down syndrome in their fetuses. At age 40, the risk of a Down syndrome birth jumps to 1 in 100. However, 75 percent of babies with Down syndrome are born to women under 35.

THIS NEW FIRST trimester risk assessment examines two blood samples followed by a sonogram—called a neuchal fold translucency—that looks for physiological signs indicating Down syndrome. The first-trimester procedure eliminates the small miscarriage risk associated with second trimester amniocentesis. But the blood test/sonogram method is not diagnostic; rather it tells parents how likely their baby is to be born with a genetic abnormality. A full 5 percent of fetuses that test positive for increased risk under the blood test/sonogram procedure are born without any disability. The result is given as a ratio; for example 1:4,000, meaning of 4,000 babies born who exhibit these test results, one will have Down syndrome. Eighty-five to 90 percent of women who receive a definitive prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome choose to terminate their pregnancies. A 2000 study published in the journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology* suggests most women would prefer to risk an amniocentesis-related miscarriage than give birth to a baby with Down syndrome.

Disability rights advocates fear such statistics speak to the public's lack of understanding of disability. A 2005 Senate bill cosponsored by Massachusetts Democrat Edward Kennedy (whose sister, Rosemary Kennedy, had Down Syndrome) and Kansas Republican Sam Brownback (who is staunchly anti-choice) sought to require that medical professionals provide expectant parents undergoing genetic screening with detailed information on genetic test failure rates and information meant to encourage raising a child with Down syndrome, despite the costs and stress. But the bill included little funding to improve the lives of people living with Down syndrome, and never came to a vote.

Nevertheless, disability rights activists remain committed to many of the bill's tenets. While all people with Down syndrome are intellectually handicapped, their mental abilities vary greatly, and to-

day many of the health problems associated with Down syndrome, such as heart disease and intestinal problems, can be treated with childhood surgery. These are facts pregnant women should know before undergoing genetic screening, says David Tolleson, executive director of the National Down Syndrome Congress, which defends the rights of people with Down syndrome. "Women are very often

particularly considering how poor genetic counseling is in this country."

The Center for Genetics and Society hopes to build bridges between feminists and the disability community by hosting a series of roundtable discussions emphasizing common ground. One recent discussion focused on pre-implantation genetic diagnosis of test-tube embryos, a largely unregulated field.

'The goal of a [genetic] counseling session is to realize that if you do the test, it takes you down a certain path. There are a lot of people who regret that they ever did the test ... because of the anxiety.'

just given a blood test as part of their general prenatal testing. Doctors can be very general about what those tests are for. We believe that women should be fully informed as to what the tests are. We're not saying you don't need to take the test; we're not commenting on that."

BECAUSE THE ACOG recommendations for first-trimester screening are so new, it is unknown how many, if any, state Medicaid plans are covering the procedure. Beginning in 2008, California is planning to offer it to all women for the same price as second trimester screening. But lack of insurance coverage, the scarcity of genetic counselors available to explain the complicated test, and the very small number of ultrasonographers certified to perform the neuchal fold analysis are sure to limit access to this early-intervention procedure.

For some disability rights activists, this is a good thing. And even abortion rights advocates worry about increasing access to genetic screening without first ensuring that low-income and non-white women aren't pressured to end pregnancies because of concern they won't have the resources to raise a disabled child. "Genetic screening takes place in a medical model of disability where the assumption is that the problem is the medical condition, not the social context within which people experience disability," says Sujatha Jesudason of the Center for Genetics and Society, an organization with a skeptical view of reproductive genetic technologies. "Given that most medical institutions and systems are very non-supportive of disability, it becomes very hard to then argue for access and affordability for genetic screening,

But advocates for increased access to reproductive technologies continue to view the issue through a pro-choice lens, worrying that only affluent women will have the choice of whether or not to raise a child with a genetic abnormality. Women with family histories of genetic disorders such as sickle cell anemia and cystic fibrosis, which are most common in specific ethnic and racial groups, need extra attention so they can plan not only pregnancies, but also prepare for the challenges of raising a disabled child. "We need to get Medicaid to do a better job of funding carrier testing and screening," says Kirsten Moore, president and CEO of the Reproductive Health Technologies Project.

Genetic counselors can help expectant parents probe their family histories and decide whether to undergo genetic tests. But for such genetic counseling to be covered under Medicaid in most states, Congress would have to amend the Social Security Act to recognize genetic counselors as allied health care providers. A 2006 report from the Department of Health and Human Services recommended just that, and also suggested governmental certification of genetic specialists.

Expanding our health care system's ability to offer professional, affordable and non-directive genetic counseling might be the best way to help expectant parents navigate the increasingly complex word of reproductive genetics. Each year, our ability to map a future person's genetic makeup, appearance, sex and abilities grows exponentially. But new medical technologies lead to harder choices. "Technology gives you information and it may give you options," says Moore. "But it never gives you answers." ■



THE OLYMPIC **HUSTLE**

Chicagoans are already beginning to fear what hosting the 2016 Summer Games might do to their city

BY MISCHA GAUS

YOU COULD SEE HIS lip curl, the beginning of a sneer. Mayor Richard M. Daley, head of Chicago's government for 18 years, was not pleased. His parade was getting rained on.

The U.S. Olympic Committee was in town, and the March weather was not cooperating. The suits were preparing to survey Washington Park, one of the proposed sites for the 2016 Olympics, on the city's south side.

The park, closed to the public for the VIP visit, had never been cleaner. No amount of preparation, though, would keep the visitors' feet from sinking into soggy turf.

It wasn't the image Daley wanted to project to the committee to help convince them to give the 2016 Summer Olympics to Chicago, and J.R. Fleming wasn't helping. A public-housing organizer and leader in an anti-Olympic coalition, he was yelling into a megaphone three feet away from Daley, Chicago Olympics Chief Patrick Ryan and National Olympic Committee members as they sat in a city bus, waiting to embark on their visit to Washington Park.

"Is the profit that important?" he taunted. "Don't bring the Olympics to Chicago.

There's too much racial tension."

Despite Fleming's warnings, on April 14 the national committee announced that Chicago had beaten out Los Angeles as its candidate to host the 2016 Summer Games. Chicago will now compete against Rio de Janeiro, Madrid, Tokyo and a handful of other cities in its quest to bring its first Olympics since 1904, when Chicago lost the games to St. Louis, which was hosting the World's Fair.

That is, unless Fleming and a growing band of doubters can convince the International Olympic Committee to take the games somewhere else. Much like the fairs of yesteryear, the Olympics has become a force unto itself, able to transform a city dramatically. The ambition to host the games fits the agenda of a city leadership enamored of gigantic, splashy projects and overweening power.

Until eight labor-backed insurgents settled last year's living-wage battle by unseating incumbents in the spring elections, the city had one gravitational pull—City Hall's fifth floor, the mayor's office. Daley's grip on power has been so absolute he promised revenge in 1999 when five of the city's 50 aldermen voted against his pick for fire chief.

Daley's autocratic "leadership style" and the international Olympic industry match perfectly. Both prefer to make decisions behind closed doors, obscure their sordid histories, send budgets through the wash to achieve the desired result and build playgrounds for the rich.

What the Olympics hath wrought

The toll the Olympic industry takes on host cities is made worse because it's so predictable. Their destructive impact is documented in an extensive study of the seven most recent cities (Seoul, Barcelona, Atlanta, Sydney, Athens, Beijing and London) chosen to host the Summer Games. It was released in June by the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), based in Geneva, Switzerland.

The worst abuses COHRE documents have taken place under the most repressive regimes. Beijing will displace 1.5 million people to host the 2008 Games, as it doubles the already frenzied pace of its urban redevelopment. Often without notice, officials cut off electricity and water to convince residents to leave. If that's unsuccessful, garbage and sewage are allowed to pile up in entryways. Left without re-

course, a few residents threatened suicide. Some succeed; others are arrested for creating public disturbances.

Beijing's brutality is hardly unique. COHRE details how South Korea's military dictatorship cleared out 720,000 people for the 1988 Seoul Games. Private security forces roamed the streets at night, using rape, beatings and arson to break community resistance.

In Chicago, the recent fate of public housing gives Fleming reason to fear the Olympics. "We've always called Mayor Daley Slobodan Milosevic," Fleming says. "The same thing is taking place—except it's urban and economic cleansing. We're watching this city be re-segregated by forces of greed."

In 1999, Daley took back the Chicago Housing Authority from the federal gov-

the city a whopping 600 affordable units at best, in a city where almost half of its 1.1 million households live in housing they cannot afford.

Who would be left to purchase the remaining thousands of market-rate condos that would flood the market following the games remains unclear. The Multiple Listing Service of Northern Illinois, which tracks real-estate transactions, says in

Atlanta gained notoriety among Olympics watchers when it had police pre-print arrest citations with the words 'African-American,' 'Male,' and 'Homeless' already filled in.

But it doesn't take a one-party state to bring out the jackboots when the Olympics come to town. Atlanta gained notoriety among Olympic watchers when it declared the central business district a "sanitized corridor" and had police pre-print arrest citations, with the words "African-American," "Male," and "Homeless" already filled in. In the lead-up to the games the city arrested about 9,000 people, a "crime" that has significant implications because people with criminal records are not eligible for public housing. Some of the homeless were given one-way bus tickets out of town.

What mass-produced arrest citations and bulldozers don't accomplish the market's invisible hand usually does. Real-estate speculation and ballooning rents push out vulnerable populations with inescapable regularity. Barcelona, touted as the most successful recent games, registered a 240 percent increase in new house prices in the run-up to the Olympics.

ernment and subsequently destroyed entire blocks of the city's infamous public-housing towers, packing people off to shoddy rental units without tracking where those evicted went. If the relocation plan was next to nonexistent, the blueprint for the destroyed sites was all too clear. Townhouses starting at \$500,000 now sit on the land that was once the infamous Cabrini-Green housing project.

Fleming and other housing advocates see the city's Olympic bid as a way to speed up gentrification on the city's mid-south side, the six mile gap between the middle-class island of Hyde Park and downtown. Between 2,500 and 6,000 condos and apartments would be converted from Daley's proposed 6,000-unit Olympic Village. No specifics have been released on what percentage will be affordable vs. market-rate, but Daley established a 10-percent rule in the affordable-housing law he pushed through the council in May. Using that as a guide suggests the games would net

each of the last three years between 800 and 1,100 were sold in the Loop.

Then things got messy

Toni Preckwinkle, the city councilor whose ward would absorb the Olympic Village, fought and lost a battle to raise the affordable housing rate to 15 percent. She says she will demand inclusion of the 15-percent rule, as well as provisions for hiring first among neighborhood residents, paying prevailing wages for construction work, and other requirements for community inclusion into the bid that Chicago will submit in September. Preckwinkle is assembling what's become known as a "Community-Benefits Agreement (CBA)," legally binding deals negotiated between developers and coalitions of local groups. Well-designed agreements are typically written into the contracts that developers sign with cities.

But some southside community leaders say Preckwinkle began discussions with bid





An artist's rendering of the temporary stadium in Washington Park (Not pictured: All of those evicted)

IMAGES COURTESY OF WWW.CHICAGO2016.ORG

officials before consulting neighborhood groups. They include the housing-rights group, Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP), and the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), the largest grassroots group in the neighborhoods that bridge the four miles between the proposed Olympic Village and Washington Park. Neither Preckwinkle nor the bid committee have brought their plans before community groups, although KOCO Director Jay Travis says that bid officials visited a neighborhood meeting in May and apologized for their lack of transparency. "You don't really see a sincere attempt to remedy this sort of clandestine planning," she says.

The indifference the city and Olympic boosters have shown toward the people affected by their plans is troubling to Greg LeRoy, director of Good Jobs First, a national group that backs community-benefits agreements. LeRoy says no CBA worthy of the name scurries from public scrutiny.

"If it's completely top-down and secret, it's P.R.," LeRoy says. "If they didn't sit down and ask anybody, how do they know those are the real issues?"

A test case of how CBAs can go wrong is New York City's Atlantic Yards development. The developer of the massive basketball arena-cum-highrise project in Brooklyn went behind closed doors with the anti-poverty group ACORN to sign a "historic" deal. Two years later, its terms keep getting worse. (Since sig-

natories to CBAs are obligated to support them, ACORN still approves of the agreement even though the percentage and definition of affordable housing continues to shrink.)

Forest City Ratner, the Atlantic Yards' development firm, donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to other signatories, many of which were created just in time to approve the deal. Ratner's pet groups had black leaders, while existing community groups—many with white leadership—were shut out. Consequently, many neighborhood groups now view CBAs as a slick divide-and-conquer tool of real-estate interests.

"What's truly astonishing is that people don't even realize this particular script has been played again and again," says Patti Hagan of Prospect Heights Action Coalition, which agitates against the Atlantic Yards project. "They're being led around by the promise of a little bit of money."

Ebonee Stevenson, a leader in Chicago's fledgling Olympic CBA coalition, says the best CBAs are backed by heavyweights, like a central labor council, that can transcend petty neighborhood concerns. That leaves Chicago in a Catch-22, because unions have told Stevenson's group they're waiting until the Olympics look certain.

Olympic activists elsewhere say that's too late, because once the games are secured dissent is equated with treason, and leverage disappears.

"They'll bring out athletes with flowers in their hair," says Chris Shaw, a leader of

2010 Watch, based in Vancouver, which will host the Winter Games in 2010. "If you can't shift the frame you're fighting Santa Claus and motherhood."

Beyond the opaque approach to community involvement are more difficult questions. Applying community-benefits agreements only make sense if the sports development is actually going to bring economic benefits, says Chris Van Dyk, leader of Citizens for More Important Things, which has campaigned successfully against sport subsidies in the Seattle region. "The only thing to ask for is that they pay their own way, like any small business," he says.

Olympic critics doubt the community-benefit model can be easily adapted to a political environment sticky with sweetheart deals between both local and international actors. "The Olympics can't be reformed or changed or made into the thing you want it to be," Shaw says. "We're seeing a re-growth of activism in our poorest neighborhoods where people are realizing they got totally suckered by the people they trusted to watch out for their interests."

The COHRE report on the social impact of Olympic Games lauded Vancouver for signing multiple binding commitments protecting environment, housing and civil rights. But three years before the city's games, watchdog groups say the promises are melting away. Vancouver's Impact on Community Coalition gave the city's Olympic organizers a "D-" grade in a May report card, noting a rise in evictions, preference for destroying forests, and resistance to opening its books and meetings.

They make money, right?

In Chicago, boosters argue that Olympic construction, tourism and spillover business will bring relief to the city's long-suffering south side. Experience teaches a different lesson.

Lake Forest College sports economist Robert Baade mulched a mountain of data after the Atlanta Olympics, revealing that the city and state could actually have lost jobs in the long-term, because Olympic mania captured public and private dollars that could have had more sustained economic impact. (Forty percent of Games-related jobs vanished after the two-week party left town.)

"I'm not against the games per se, but don't try to sell it as an economic bonanza,"

Baade says. "Prior to a mega-event, people tend to stay away. Prices for virtually everything are higher than they otherwise would be. And we know from research around the world that residents leave a city hosting a mega-event. They take their money and spend it elsewhere."

And University of South Florida economist Philip Porter discovered that in Atlanta the kind of tourist income games

of Toronto sociologist who has written three books on the Olympics, says games-related development projects stomp on democratic rights. "Citizens may not have wanted it right there, at that site, at that time," she says. "They may have had different priorities but they had to pay up."

Allowing something as important as the Olympics to come before the voters would break with Daley's legacy of government

a majority African-American community with one of the city's lowest per-capita income rates, had no "pet service providers."

What the Olympics could do to other public services is reason enough to oppose them, says James Pfluecke, an organizer with the Coalition to Protect Public Housing. "It's going to drain every penny from every corner," he says.

Besides starving out other services, host-

Recent host cities have woken up after the Games with nasty hangovers. Athens took on \$9 billion in debt. Even the vaunted Barcelona Games stuck taxpayers with a \$1.4 billion tab.

backers always promise didn't materialize. Hotel vacancies, retail sales, and airport use all stayed essentially the same despite the Olympics. Since the surplus rarely materializes, debt surely follows.

Olympic committees fix their budgets by deleting the costs of infrastructure projects from their balance sheets, because keeping them in makes the games look like not such a great deal. Recent host cities have woken up after the games with wretched hangovers. Athens is swimming in \$9 billion of debt, Sydney took on \$3.2 billion, and the vaunted Barcelona Games stuck taxpayers with a \$1.4 billion tab. The 2012 London Games has already spent twice its budget, and estimates for Beijing's bonanza come in around \$80 billion.

Still, these big projects create the "legacy" used to entice otherwise reluctant groups to support Olympic bids. Bigger airports, convention centers, cultural facilities, new roads and trains are the usual mix of enticements. Best of all for developers, the International Olympic Committee's unforgiving deadlines create an artificial rush to build, pushing social and environmental assessments to the wayside.

City leaders have promised the Olympics will bring Chicago its first new train line in two decades, a long-coveted circle line to connect the radial spokes that emanate from downtown. But the route favored by the Daley administration ignores the wide swaths of Chicago's west and south sides without train service. Known as the "yuppie line" among transit activists, it is the buckle in the Daley administration's belt of gentrifying neighborhoods circling downtown.

Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, a University

of Toronto sociologist who has written three books on the Olympics, says games-related development projects stomp on democratic rights. "Citizens may not have wanted it right there, at that site, at that time," she says. "They may have had different priorities but they had to pay up."

Allowing something as important as the Olympics to come before the voters would break with Daley's legacy of government by fiat. Five years ago, when Soldier Field, home to the Bears football franchise, was renovated at a cost of \$632 million, taxpayers kicked in two-thirds of the renovation's cost, but weren't granted a referendum to voice their opinion on the matter.

The renovation gutted the stadium, built in 1924, landing what appears to be an alien craft atop its neoclassical colonnades. Those were left intact because tearing down the entire stadium would have required a public vote, says University of Chicago sports economist Allen Sanderson.

"The sense was, 'If we go to a referendum we might lose,' he says, "so let's take a half loaf instead of no loaf."

But the renovation proved shortsighted. Because the new Soldier Field cannot accommodate the 80,000 seats needed to host an Olympics, the city will be forced to finance a "temporary" stadium. Early official estimates have put its cost at \$366 million, but that number is considered so low they've been forced to stipulate that the cost could rise due to inflation.

Capital, altius, fortius

The games provide the kind of grand excuse dreamed of by the interests who hold Daley close to recast the city in their image—they couldn't be happier. The Olympics would boost business-service providers that, according to Dick Simpson, a former alderman who researches city politics at the University of Illinois-Chicago, have steadily increased their campaign contributions during Daley's reign.

The other local winner would be developers, one of whom complained to the *Chicago Sun-Times* that the neighborhood,

ing the Olympics leaves a city with a flotilla of white elephants. Within months of the 2000 Games, one of Sydney's privately financed stadiums needed \$20 million in public money to rejuvenate the stadium area, which by virtue of its distance from central Sydney is losing out to the old stadium complex. Montreal, host to the 1976 Games, converted its velodrome—a circular track for bicycle racing—into a biosphere, not exactly residents' first development priority. As the games grow ever larger, they demand more extensive and specialized accommodations that have little post-Game public use.

"I've been able to restrain the urge to go lugging," says Steve Pace, who led an Olympic watchdog group in Salt Lake City in the '90s. "So have 99.5 percent of the state's residents."

The air of inevitability isn't as thick as games boosters would have you believe. In an anti-sprawl mood, Colorado voters rejected the 1976 Denver Winter Games after it was awarded them. Local opposition in Toronto, Berlin and Nagoya, Japan, is credited with preventing the Olympics from landing on those cities.

Not that the International Olympic Committee would admit it. The IOC's official report after being greeted by 15,000 angry Berliners declared that "whilst vocal opposition to the bid exists, this is a minority group."

Arrogance and executive fiat aren't going to quell Chicago's Olympic doubters. While the battle is just beginning, the resistance is already starting to stiffen.

"Given the power around the table," says Ebonee Stevenson, "words mean nothing." ■

He Shoots, She Scores

When Mike became Christine, she gave Los Angeles sports fans a courtside view of gender politics

BY JOHN IRELAND

FOR ALL OF ITS trappings of money, fame, and corruption, professional sports has a lot to do with character. Avid sports fans seem to respect those who face up to overwhelming challenge and overcome adversity. So it should not come as a surprise that readers rose in solidarity when a 23-year veteran sports writer announced in the *Los Angeles Times* that he would return from a short hiatus ... as a woman.

On April 26, Mike Penner wrote what he thought would be the toughest article of his career. "I am a transsexual sports-writer. It has taken more than 40 years, a million tears and hundreds of hours of soul-wrenching therapy for me to work up the courage to type those words." The piece ran in the Sports section, next to his regular column.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Penner's story was "by mid-evening, one of the most heavily viewed stories on latimes.com in the last year, with about half a million page views." Nancy Sullivan, executive director of communications for the newspaper, says "There was a massive response to this story, not only on our website, but across the media spectrum." The online message board accompanying the article was closed to comments in less than 8 hours, with 800 comments logged in. Hundreds more messages were sent via e-mail. Responses to the revelation came in three distinct flavors: kudos from sports fans, effusive thanks from other transsexuals and rants from bible-thumpers. Readers' initial shock, however, subsided almost immediately.

Michael Daniel Penner returned to work on May 23 as Christine Michelle Daniels. So far, it appears to be smooth sailing. But Daniels' very public transition has put a spotlight on a culture that is slow to acknowledge, let alone attempt to rehabilitate its ingrained intolerance and bigotry.

Michael Daniel Penner returned to work on May 23 as Christine Michelle Daniels.



MICHAEL DANIELS/ MICHAEL WITHERS

Translating her world

"The concept of one day having to come out publicly, as an *LA Times* sports columnist, was a paralyzing fear that, looking back, kept me from transitioning at least 5 years sooner," Daniels tells *In These Times*. She says she was "bracing for the worst."

Many of Daniels' colleagues have gone out of their way to champion her cause. "Some sportswriters," she says, "have written column items of support, some who know me pretty well have spoken to

others on my behalf, without my knowledge, delivering the message that, 'This is just another writer, a normal person, facing a difficult challenge.'"

Sports blogs almost uniformly expressed admiration for her courage and wished her well. Overall, readers seem to be mildly bemused, but focused on her return to work. One commenter summed up the majority consensus: "Yea yea yea and all that girly stuff, no problema. ... But how 'bout them Angels this weekend? Gonna get back to

bizz? Need you back Christine.”

Some response has been negative. It's difficult to assess where it originates—within the sports community or those drawn by the spectacle. TheAngryT.com, an obscure sports blog, rants, “I am a straight male ... Do you care what I look like or whether I wear high cut panties out of the Sears women's wear catalogue? *LA Times* readers should no longer look for Mike Penner's column when they want hard-hitting sports journalism.”

Sportswriters frequently express passion and enthusiasm for their subject, exposing more personality than reporters covering different beats. They often develop loyal followings and become a trusted voice that keeps readers up-to-date. In a world of high ticket prices, the sportswriter functions as the reader's passport to the field, court or stadium. For Daniels, this connection to her fans, and the known quality of her writing, may have smoothed her transition.

“I just always liked the spark in his writing, his wit and his use of language,” says fellow Southern California journalist Joel Beers. “Penner's done a lot: covered the Olympics, wrote about media, NFL lead writer. But, after 23 years, it'd seem he'd be a dean of the *Times* sports section as opposed to just another very good writer in a section that has a lot of them. I always wondered why he seemed to bounce from beat to beat but never got what would seem to me the choicest of assignment: columnist.”

It would seem that Daniels' bravery has yielded that opportunity twofold. She has two columns: *Day in L.A.*, which the paper describes as “a daily column on the sports events, personalities and themes that matter most to Southern Californians,” and *Woman in Progress*, a blog on latimes.com in which she chronicles her transformation, comments on the angst that accompanied her public “coming out,” and describes re-connecting with friends and colleagues she had kept at a distance since beginning hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in December.

Her first few weeks of posts indicate that each blog retains its distinct focus. Based on the heavy traffic to both blogs, much of her original audience has stayed on, in order to catch a glimpse of her personal journey. Daniels is making sports history by creating a space where questions of intolerance and bigotry can be posed and, through online comments, discussed.

Daniels knows that the average sports-page reader experiences cognitive dissonance when imagining a man donning a wig, a dress, pumps and lipstick to head out for a day at the mall. In a recent post, she related why many male-to-female “transwomen” are focused on the exterior. “We never had a girlhood. We missed out on all the fun (dolls, sleepovers, mother-daughter outings) and the rites of passage natural-born females take for granted... [It's] just a normal part of growing up female.”

Her employer's approach to the situation helped normalize Daniel's gender-switch. When she revealed to her supervisor, Sports Editor Randy Harvey, that she would be transitioning, he insisted that she write the piece in order to stay in control of the story. Some critics thought that personal narrative belonged in the Op Ed section and not in the Sports section. Others believed she should be fired. One post to a blog sponsored by CBS SportsLine.com put it this way: “When a reporter makes himself the story, which he is clearly doing, he is definitely not serving the interests of his reading public and quite honestly should be fired for these ego-driven actions.”

In the majority of states, being fired would be a distinct possibility. In February, the city of Largo, Fla., fired its city manager of 14 years after he revealed his plans to undergo sex reassignment surgery, also known as SRS. California, however, is one of the eight states (along with Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Rhode Island and Hawaii, as well as Washington D.C.) that have passed laws that prohibit discrimination based on gender identity. Oregon will join the list on January 1, 2008, and the legislatures of Vermont, Iowa and Colorado have passed bills that await their governors' signatures.

An unexamined culture

Traditionally, the sports world is quick to minimize and ignore issues of bigotry when they arise and instead “focus on the game.” In so doing, it misses a chance to discuss the issues and identify the underlying symptoms. Some would sweep Daniels' revelation under the rug in order to maintain the status quo and avoid what might be unsettling self-examination.

U.S. sports history is rife with examples of a pervasive culture of racism, sexism and homophobia. Football com-

Transsexuals in popular culture

Transsexuality has been on the American radar just over half a century. On December 1, 1952, the *New York Daily News* splashed the headline, “Ex-GI Becomes Blond Beauty.” Christine (née George) Jorgenson returned from Europe after serving in the U.S. Armed Forces and taking a detour to Denmark. Although the operation was heralded as the first sex-reassignment surgery, such operations had taken place since the '20s. Jorgenson became an immediate sensation and was interviewed on radio and television, becoming a willing spokesperson for transsexual awareness. Before she died in 1989, Jorgenson said she had given the sexual revolution “a good swift kick in the pants.”

Hollywood's recent portrayals of “transgender” characters have focused on the rejection and violence that is all-too-common in transsexuals' daily lives. In 1992, *The Crying Game* used artful camera work to elicit a shocking cinematic effect revolving around misperception and “passing” as the opposite sex. *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), *Soldier's Girl* (2003), and *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story* depict real-life murders of transgender people.

Fictional dramatizations have boosted the national visibility and humanity of transsexuals. Tom Wilkinson plays a man who “comes out” as a male-to-female transsexual in *Normal* (2005) and Felicity Huffman portrays a transitioning male-to-female transsexual in *Transamerica* (2006). The cable television documentary series *TransGeneration* (2005) follows four college students in various stages of transitioning. Broadcast television's ABC daytime drama *All My Children* introduced a transgender character, as well, in 2006. Moving from cinema to television movie, cable to broadcast television, transgender issues are permeating the American popular culture, bringing a message of tolerance and acceptance.

mentator Jimmy “The Greek” Snyder was fired by the CBS network in 1988 after describing on the air how African Americans were naturally superior athletes because they had been bred to produce stronger offspring during slavery. The words that got him fired were, “During the slave period, the slave owner would breed his big black with his big woman so that he would have a big black kid—that’s where it all started.”

Although primarily criticized as racist, Don Imus’ April 4 reference to the Rutgers University women’s basketball team as “nappy headed hos” revealed an insidious sexism that has been at the core of the sports world’s resistance to professional female athletes. Just months before, retired NBA player Tim Hardaway was suspended from participating in NBA publicity events after saying on a local radio show: “Well, you know I hate gay people, so I let it be known. I don’t like gay people and I don’t like to be around gay people. I am homophobic. I don’t like it.” Homophobia has persisted like a healed-over injury that acts up when gender roles are challenged.

“That culture is very real,” says Dan-

iels. But she sees her proactive “coming out” and the *Woman in Progress* blog as an opportunity for fans to examine their discomfort with transsexuals in sports. Her blog holds up a magnifying glass for those who are willing to peer through it.

Daniels is in the process of getting new press credentials from local teams. “I have not ventured into a press box or locker room as Christine yet. But soon,” she said with anticipation. “Most of the publicity directors from the local pro sports teams have contacted me to say, ‘Welcome back, Christine, we look forward to working with you.’”

Transsexuals in sports

Daniels is not the first transsexual to emerge from the sports world. In 2003, Chris Kahrl, sportswriter and founding columnist of the annual *Baseball Prospectus*, the gold standard for baseball analysis, became Christina. At the time, Kahrl wrote, “nobody has batted an eye,” calling sports “the ultimate American social bridge,” transcending “race, gender, class, and culture.” The history of transsexuals as sports players, however, hasn’t always borne out such triumphant optimism.

In 1972, Richard Raskind reached the final of the men’s national 35-and-over tennis championships. Three years later, he underwent sex-reassignment surgery, becoming Renée Richards. In 1976, the U.S. Tennis Association denied her entrance into the U.S. Open. In 1977, the New York Supreme Court ruled in her favor, allowing her to reach the doubles final at that year’s competition. She went on to coach Martina Navratilova to win two of her 20 Wimbledon championship titles.

For nearly 20 years, women’s golf, which has a significant number of lesbian players and fans, has excluded transsexuals from competition. Two years after transsexual Charlotte Wood placed third in the U.S. Senior Women’s Amateur in 1987, the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) added a “female at birth” clause in its entry forms and many other golf organizations around the world followed suit.

In 2004, however, the Australian Ladies Professional Golf Association (ALPGA) reversed its 1991 “female at birth” decision and allowed Mianne Bagger to join. Bagger, who was born male and had SRS in 1995, was ranked sixth on the national amateur circuit before turning profes-



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sional in 2004. She currently plays on the ALPGA and Ladies European Tours. Bagger's success has had an international impact, as well. In 2005, the USGA changed its policy, allowing transgender athletes to compete in the U.S. Women's Open. The same year, the Ladies Golf Union did the same, which allowed Bagger to play in the Women's British Open.

And in May 2004, the International Olympic Committee published its "Stockholm Consensus," outlining eligibility for participation in gender-classified competitions. It states that eligibility of transgender athletes to compete should begin no sooner than "two years after gonadectomy," that "verifiable" hormone therapy has been administered, and that "legal recognition of their assigned sex has been conferred by the appropriate authorities."

Changing medical consensus

The confusion manifested in the sports world over transsexuality is understandable when one considers the lack of settled opinion in the medical world. Much has changed in the past 50 years and definitive classification is still in flux.

The term "transsexual" entered popular parlance in the '50s to describe a person who identified and often presented as a member of the opposite gender. In 1980, the American Psychological Association added "Transsexualism" to its Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM-III). In 1994, the group replaced the diagnosis with "Gender Identity Disorder" (DSM-IV). The term "transgender" emerged around the same time to describe those with unusual gender identities without psychopathologizing them as "disordered." This is considered an umbrella term covering all types of "gender dysphoria," which literally means being uncomfortable with one's gender.

Medical professionals have different opinions as to the appropriateness of hormones, surgeries, transition counseling and even conversion therapy, which would seek to reverse the gender dysphoria and reconcile the individual to his or her biological gender. Treatments can cost between \$15,000 and \$50,000 and are not covered by most U.S. health insurance policies. Many countries that have comprehensive nationalized health care, including Canada and most European countries, do cover the cost of treatment, to varying degrees.

Surgery and legal recognition

Legal recognition of gender change varies around the world. In the United States, only Idaho, Ohio and Tennessee prohibit the change of sex on a birth certificate. Every province in Canada permits this, as do most western European countries. The latter, however, require proof of a diagnosis and HRT, in addition to SRS. Spain requires proof of HRT for

'You know, for more than 20 years now, I have been a woman sportswriter going into locker rooms all the time. Only then, nobody, myself included, realized it.'

two years, but not surgery. Germany will grant the official change of gender only if the person is unmarried, permanently infertile, and has had surgery changing the "outer sexual characteristics." The United Kingdom requires only that the person prove s/he suffers from gender dysphoria. Japan will grant the legal change, but only if the person is unmarried and childless. Australia is one of the few countries that will issue a new birth certificate, as opposed to amending an existing one.

Thailand has become a haven for expensive SRS procedures for transsexuals from around the globe, making it a hotspot for this type of "medical tourism." Ironically, Thailand does not grant changes in gender in official records for its own citizens.

The small town of Trinidad, Colo., is known as the gender reassignment capital of the United States, due to the work of former Army surgeon Stanley Biber, who specialized in the surgeries in the late '60s. Before his death in 2006, he estimated that he had performed 5,800 such procedures and trained hundreds of other surgeons. The International Foundation for Gender Education estimates that more than 30,000 Americans have undergone SRS.

Unlike the rest of the Muslim world, Iran sanctions SRS, as it has been valid under Islamic Shariah since Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a fatwa in 1983. Since homosexuality is punishable by death, however, it appears that surgery is the only option for many who might otherwise be hanged for being gay. As a result, an unregulated and marginally underground surgical industry has developed, leaving

in its wake many post-operative patients who are not technically transsexual.

Life goes on

Discussing her public transition with *In These Times*, Daniels acknowledges that hard work lies ahead. "The overwhelming warm, positive and supportive response I have received has done much to buoy my spirits and get me

emotionally prepared for the next career hurdle: covering sporting events and interviewing athletes and coaches as Christine," she says. "You know, for more than 20 years now, I have been a woman sportswriter going into locker rooms all the time. Only then, nobody, myself included, realized it."

Daniels will likely remain an expert in two realms. On her *Woman in Progress* blog, she will continue to share her own journey and transition from male to female, educating and provoking thousands of casual onlookers, while providing support and comfort to those on a similar journey. In her "Day in L.A." column, she will remain the first stop on many a fan's morning read-through of the Sports section, continuing to digest and contextualize the world of sports with her characteristic wit.

In a recent blog entry, Daniels addressed, if indirectly, the many questions people have asked about the extent and timetable of her transition. She wrote, "Gender identity is not about genitals. It is about what's in your head and in your heart. I am not taking a vacation to have SRS. I am taking a vacation to have a vacation."

Regardless of what comes her way, Daniels will do what she does best: churn out 2,000-plus words a day that speak to her readers. For reporter and reader alike, there's not much better than that. ■

JOHN IRELAND covers progressive politics and social dynamics in the United States, exploring "democracy in action." He has been published in numerous periodicals, including *In These Times*, *Newsweek*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Baltimore Sun* and *The Advocate*. He can be reached through his blog, www.JohnIrelandBlog.com



Kissing up to K Street

Democrats are selling out the economic populism that got them elected in the first place

BY DAVID SIROTA

IN 1903, JOURNALIST WILLIAM Riordan published a series of interviews with George Washington Plunkitt, who was probably the most famous leader of New York's Tammany Hall (other than Boss Tweed himself). During a discussion of Lincoln Steffens' then-new book *The Shame of the Cities*, Plunkitt told Riordan that Steffens "can't see no difference between honest graft and dishonest graft and consequent, he gets things all mixed up."

The same thing could be said for our Congress.

"Honest graft," said Plunkitt, is when "the politician looks after his own interests, the organization's interests and the people's interests all at the same time."

Dishonest graft, by contrast, is engaged in by "looters" who "go in for themselves alone without considering their organization or the people." Think Tom DeLay and the Abramoff scandal. As the Associated Press reported last year, the Abramoff-

DeLay relationship made DeLay "a king of campaign fundraising," allowing him "to visit cliff-top Caribbean resorts, golf courses designed by PGA champions and four-star restaurants—all courtesy of donors who bankrolled his political money empire." In the process, he helped pass energy legislation that gave away taxpayer money to energy companies and tax legislation that gave away taxpayer money to millionaires—all while creating a scandal that eventually helped to break his party's hold on Congress.

But in a certain sense, Republican corruption is the purest form of honest graft. The Republican Party does not pretend to be anything other than the party of Big Money. Take the famous K Street Project: designed by Republican congressmen to use the promise of access—and the threat of no access—to force corporate lobbying organizations in Washington to fire Democrats and hire Republicans, so that those new Republican lobbyists could si-

phon as much corporate campaign contributions as possible to Republican political candidates.

Had this operation performed its work in secret, one might be able to say Republicans at least tried to pretend they were something they were not. But the K Street Project actually had its own public website, bragging to the world about its pay-to-play scheme.

This is "honest" graft—that is, being open and honest about what the American Heritage Dictionary defines as the "unscrupulous use of one's position to derive profit or advantages." The Republican Congress didn't make any serious effort to pretend to be anything else. And in holding onto Congress for 12 years, they made the same successful calculation Plunkitt did: They believed that honest graft doesn't "hurt Tammany with the people" if the people perceive it to be out in the open, and merely a small, necessary and innocuous cost of the govern-

ment doing business.

Clearly, this formula failed in 2006 when, after six years of one-party control of Congress and the White House, the American public started to see how big, wasteful and destructive Republican corruption really was.

Democrats rode their populist, anti-corruption platform to victory in 2006. But as we are now beginning to see, what we may have with the Democrats is merely a transfer from honest graft to dishonest graft—that is, corrupt behavior that pretends to be done in the people's name and that flies in the face of what the people were promised.

On May 10, a handful of Democratic congressional leaders held a press conference to trumpet a so-called “deal” with the Bush administration to push forward a package of lobbyist-written trade deals—the very same kinds of trade deals 100 of their candidates in 2006 said they would work to stop if elected to Congress. Though Democrats said they had secured basic labor and environmental protections in these deals, Thomas J. Donohue, the Bush-connected head of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, told reporters that he had been given “assurances that the labor provisions [in the deal] cannot be read to require compliance.”

Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) provides a good example of dishonest graft. In 1993, Emanuel was the Clinton administration aide charged with ramming NAFTA through Congress “over the dead bodies” of labor and environmental groups, as American Express's CEO cheered at the time. Emanuel orchestrated weekly meetings with K Street lobbyists to strategize about how to pressure Democratic lawmakers. Emanuel went on to cash in as an investment banker, raking in roughly \$16 million over a two-year period. From his Wall Street perch in 2000, he published a scathing *Wall Street Journal* op-ed demanding Congress pass the China free trade deal—another K Street-backed goodie that has helped keep American wages stagnating in the face of skyrocketing corporate profits, and is now projected to destroy at least 1 million American jobs, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

Just two years after grossly outspending an opponent to buy an Illinois congressional seat, Emanuel was appointed to the House Ways and Means Committee, the panel that oversees trade policy and that

helped corporate lobbyists ram NAFTA through back in 1993. Emanuel also was appointed head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which ran millions of dollars worth of ads trumpeting Democrats anti-corruption platform, and which supported the scores of Democrats running against the very lobbyist-written trade policies Emanuel has based his political career on.

What we may have with the Democrats is merely a transfer from honest graft to dishonest graft—that is, corrupt behavior that pretends to be done in the people's name.

Now, with Emanuel as Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, we see dishonest graft kick into high gear. The same day as the press conference, a group of House Democrats wrote a formal letter to Emanuel demanding he hold a Democratic Caucus meeting to discuss the secret trade negotiations going on between a handful of Democrats and the White House. That letter, according to *The Hill*, was “rebuffed” even though, again, it was Emanuel's DCCC that aggressively supported Democrats 2006 fair trade candidates. No meeting occurred, and instead Democratic leaders held their press conference, announcing a secret trade deal that, like NAFTA, is strongly backed by K Street lobbyists, but opposed by organized labor, environmental groups, health care groups and grassroots Democrats. Meanwhile, when Emanuel was asked by the *Politico*'s Jeff Patch for details about why Democrats were now backing off their promises to reform lobbying laws so as to prevent Abramoff-style abuse, he did his best Dick Cheney impression, telling the reporter, “Why don't you go fuck yourself.”

Running a campaign against corruption, against lobbyist-written trade policies and for lobbying reform, and then using the power granted by voters based on that campaign to engage in corruption, pass lobbyist-written trade pacts and reject the most minimal lobbying reforms—all in exchange for campaign contributions—is Plunkitt's very definition of dishonest graft. It is “political looting” and it is the result of a hostile takeover of the Democratic Party by Big Money interests.

But, then, perhaps we shouldn't be surprised. It is no secret that Democrats

have a very powerful faction within their ranks that is perfectly happy engaging in the same kind of pay-to-play corruption that Republicans mastered. It was, for instance, Minority Whip Steny Hoyer who bragged on his taxpayer-funded website about starting his own K Street Project and whose top legislative aide moonlighted as his political action committee fundraiser. It is a corporate-funded front

group known as the Democratic Leadership Council that continues to push for lobbyist-written trade deals that include no basic labor, human rights or environmental standards.

And it is top Democratic presidential candidates who publicly jockey for connections to Big Money interests as if building a warchest of corporate cash was one of the many achievements they need to flaunt in order to win over voters.

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Hillary Clinton, for instance, talks a lot about helping the middle class, yet as the number one Senate recipient of health care cash, she also now gives speeches apologizing for ever pushing universal health care. Additionally, Mark Penn, her top campaign strategist is a pollster who moonlights as the CEO of one of the world's largest corporate PR firms—a firm that helps companies run, among other things, union busting campaigns. Barack Obama, meanwhile, has been caught trying to sidestep the spirit of his own much-bragged-about ban on taking money from lobbyists. And *BusinessWeek* reports that both candidates have asked Wall Street executives—many of whom are their top donors—to “refine” their official economic platforms, all the while campaigning for the nomination of the “party of the people.”

This all started right after the Americans' votes were counted in 2006. Days after the election, both the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* published articles about how Democratic-affiliated corporate lobbyists were salivating at the prospects of using the new Congress to rake in legislative favors for their clients. “Democratic lobbyists are fielding calls from pharmaceutical companies, the oil and gas industry and military companies,” the *Times* wrote. “Senior [Democratic] aides are now tempted to leave Capitol Hill to become lobbyists and potentially quadruple their salaries.” As incoming Speaker Nancy Pe-

losi proclaimed that election night would usher in “the most honest, most open and most ethical Congress in history,” her own chief of staff was being named a “K Street Superstar” by *BusinessWeek* as he quickly transitioned to life as a lobbyist for Exxon-Mobil and pharmaceutical giant Amgen.

Of course, many look at what's going on and can't believe their eyes. The same

cash, we have bundled campaign checks and PACs. Instead of shadowy hustlers, we have professional lobbyists. We live in a system that pretends to be clean, while being utterly dirty.

The only way to stop this is to create public financing systems whereby taxpayers provide qualifying candidates money that does not come with the expectation

It's much more difficult to vote with the people when you are in the majority and Big Money interests are relying on you, pressuring you, and seducing you.

Democrats who are so eagerly selling out to corporate interests had decent voting records while in the minority. But majority power is the ultimate corruption aphrodisiac—and the ultimate truth serum. It's easy to vote with the people when Big Money interests don't need your vote. It's much more difficult to vote with the people when you are in the majority and Big Money interests are relying on you, pressuring you, and seducing you.

Indeed, graft—honest and dishonest—is built into the system itself.

We scoff at developing countries for allowing rampant corruption. We pride ourselves on having a cleaner more democratic system. But the only real difference is that American corruption is codified into law. Instead of envelopes of

of specific legislative favors. Unless we as a nation invest public resources into our own democracy, we will continue to make a mockery of our democracy.

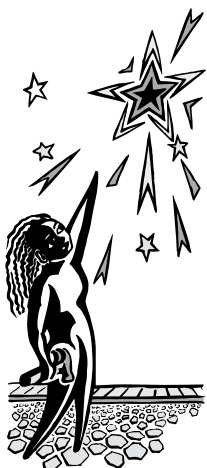
States like Maine, Arizona and Connecticut have created successful public financing systems that have brought down campaign costs and given political opportunities to aspiring candidates who aren't just specialists in raising huge sums of money. And more states are considering making the move.

Similarly, strong public financing legislation was introduced this year in the Senate by Illinois' Dick Durbin. But as usual, the pay-to-play culture in Washington is hostile to anything that threatens the existing system. And Politicians who reach Congress are masters of it.

Ultimately, I am an optimist, which of course makes me perpetually disappointed. But there is only so much cynicism and anger that a democracy can take before change is forced on the system.

Polls today show more Americans than ever understand just how corrupt their government is, and they are fighting back. Two years ago we were being told just how “red” and “conservative” America was, and then a Democratic platform of anti-corruption and economic populism swept the 2006 election. The public is disgusted with graft, and is willing to reward candidates and parties that are equally as disgusted. The party that figures out this truism, washes its hands of both honest and dishonest graft, and pursues a real reform agenda, is the party that will dominate American politics in a more thorough way than George Washington Plunkitt's Tammany Hall and its modern-day successors in today's Washington, D.C. ever dreamed. ■

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When College Ends, So Does Activism

Why selling out is a depressingly rational choice for many graduates

BY ADAM DOSTER

JAIME NELSON COULD MAKE anyone feel lazy. Over the past four years, Nelson, an undergraduate activist at the University of Michigan, has led writing workshops with Michigan's incarcerated, organized voter registration drives to battle the anti-affirmative action ballot initiative in 2006, and united local immigrant rights and labor organizations through the Restaurant Workplace Project, a coalition that sought to expose the dangerous working conditions faced by undocumented employees of Ann Arbor's dining establishments.

She did this on top of a work schedule—divorced from her political work—that would make Horatio Alger squirm. As a supervisor at the university library, Nelson checked out books five nights a week until 2 a.m. Two summers ago, she took a job as one of only two women on a road-paving crew in her native Kalamazoo. When she worked as a full-time unpaid intern for the public defender's office in Washington D.C., she logged an additional 30 hours a week as a hotel attendant.

Why would anyone put herself through this? Nelson had to balance her conscience with her checkbook. Paying for college was her responsibility. "My parents just didn't have money and I didn't want to ask them for it," she says, "so everything that I had, I had to pay for basically by myself."

In April, she graduated with almost \$30,000 in student loans. So she's keeping her job at the library at night while searching during the day for work in progressive politics, which she knows won't pay enough to cover both her cost of living and her current debt. "School debt is the best kind of debt to have," she says, "but it's still debt."

Nelson is quick to point out that others have it much worse than her, but her story illustrates a growing trend among the re-

cent crop of college graduates. Despite a job market that will treat the class of 2007 favorably, employment in progressive politics is a dicey enterprise for many left-leaning activists and thinkers. The value of jobs varies across industries and organizations, but few are economically sustainable or intellectually stimulating, which is a problem for students and progressive veterans alike.

Political McJobs

That few entry level political jobs exist is part of the problem, as documented by Columbia University sociology professor

Dana R. Fisher in her book, *Activism, Inc.* Fisher spent two years study-



ing one of the country's largest canvassing companies, part of an exploitative industry that has employed millions of young Americans. In the late '90s, progressive organizations—concerned with raising money and membership totals but conscious of their costs—began outsourcing their organizing campaigns to centralized intermediary organizations. This model is efficient but problematic. "Outsourcing makes sense if you're just thinking about your bottom line," Fisher says. "The problem is that it doesn't make sense if you're trying to build lasting connections with future progressive leaders or with local people."

Under this canvassing system, young organizers become contingent labor, susceptible to low pay, long hours, no benefits and no training in the real skills necessary to succeed in building local power. In some ways, the model cultivates a culture of deprivation; young people are taught to think that sacrifice is a prerequisite for progressive change and thus they tolerate exploitation for the sake of the movement. And because most organizations outsource these jobs, participating in this crooked system is one of the few avenues for paid work. "One could question," says Fisher, "whether Saul Alinsky, Ralph Nader or Cesar Chavez would have become successful at leading different aspects of the progressive movement if they came up through the model we have today?"

Budgetary concerns of progressive organizations also contribute to underinvestment in youth. Take aspiring journalists. The few media outlets in which writers can publish thoughtful and progressively opinionated articles work on shoestring budgets. This means they can't afford to hire experienced staff writers, much less young people committed to political journal-

ism. Left-of-center think tanks face similar challenges. Institutions like the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities and the Center for American Progress have a handful of low-paid internships—both of which pay less than \$10 an hour—but few entry-level job opportunities with a salary and benefits. The Progressive Policy Institute and the Brookings Institution don't even provide internship stipends, a major concern for young people transplanted to the cities these organizations call home (Washington D.C. and New York City) that are among the world's most expensive places to live. These cost inhibitions significantly limit the scope of their applicant pool.

Cash rules everything around me

Because of the growing cost of college, these tiring, low-paying gigs or unpaid internships are increasingly inadequate options for left-leaning graduates. With state and federal legislators redirecting funds away from universities, college tuition has outpaced family income for the past 15 years and inflation for the past 30 years.

The burden of payment has also been

shifted to the students. Loans have replaced interest-free grants as the most common form of recompense, resulting in a system whereby the average student today, according to the Center for American Progress, graduates with debt almost three and a half times that

insured 20-somethings to 14 million. Among the lucky few who can pay for and get through college, 40 percent will lose their familial coverage after graduation, with under-funded organizations unlikely to pick up the costs of employer-based healthcare.

Young people are taught to think that sacrifice is a prerequisite for progressive change and thus they become willing to tolerate exploitation for the sake of the movement.

of graduates just 10 years ago. "The typical student is leaving with about \$19,000 dollars in student loan debt," says Tamara Draut, author of *Strapped: Why America's 20- and 30-Somethings Can't Get Ahead*. "And that is going to create a financial pinch when they get their first job."

Health care is another concern. A 2006 Commonwealth Fund study found that since 2000, 2.5 million people between the age of 19 and 29 lost healthcare coverage, bringing the grand total of un-

These financial burdens disproportionately affect students of color and those from less secure economic backgrounds, whose need for job stability is generally more pressing than that of their classmates. "It's always been hard to attract class diversity in the progressive movement. It's largely been dominated by people who have family backgrounds that enable them, for whatever reason, to take a lower salary, particularly if they are just starting out," says Draut. "I think the problem is that now it's become even

Urban MEDITATIONS

By Kip Tiernan and Fran Froehlich

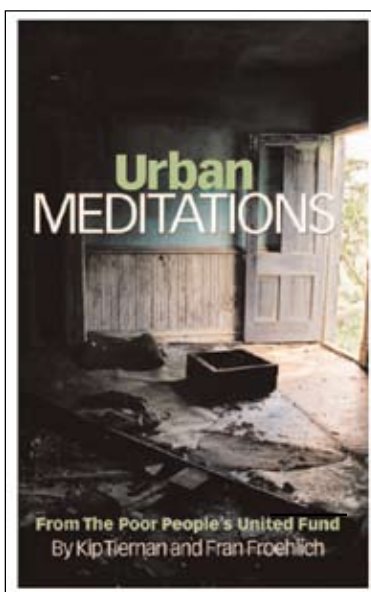
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more challenging.” All of these factors lead even the most socially conscious graduates away from progressive politics toward less-fulfilling career fields.

Wasting a big chance

The importance of engaging and gainfully employing young progressives is hard to overstate, both for its immediate practicality and the long-term sustainability of the left. By ignoring progressive grads’ economic constraints, the progressive movement—activists and funders—are squandering an immense opportunity to utilize the ideology, size and energy of the post-graduate generation.

Politically, young folks trend well to the left of older generations. According to a February study by the New Politics Institute, “Millennials,” generally people born between 1978 and 1998, “are more likely than any others to hold opinions considered to be ‘liberal’ or ‘progressive’ across virtually all issue clusters: economic intervention, environmental protection, security, crime, education, and social issues.” This includes a full 60 percent who believe invading Iraq was a mistake.

There are a lot of them, too; new graduates are part of the biggest birth influx in 40 years, an encouraging statistic for those concerned with filling the void soon to be created by retiring Baby Boomers. And unencumbered by family restrictions and interested in a little adventure, many young progressives will relocate and log long hours, as long as they can avoid financial destruction and psychological burnout while doing so.

Matching the infrastructure of the right is crucial. Lefties face an uphill battle competing with young conservatives, who are groomed through a variety of comprehensive youth development programs. One example—among many—is the National Journalism Center (NJC), founded 30 years ago by conservative journalist M. Stanton Evans. The NJC runs six-to-12 week training sessions where budding reporters learn technical skills as well as the intricacies of substantive policies issues. But the love doesn’t end there. After the training period, attendees are funneled into competitive internship programs—in conservative or mainstream media outlets—and then added to an NJC job bank, where staffers help place graduates in permanent media positions. According to its website, “Over 1,400 students have now gradu-

ated from the NJC’s 12-week training sessions ... and we estimate some 900 of these have gone on to media and media-related positions.”

Building for the future

One remedy for this crisis is the professionalization of progressive politics. If legislators won’t find ways to ease the financial burden hampering young folks, politically engaged graduates, eager to work full-time for social change, should be given the opportunity to provide for their economic needs in the same way as their colleagues in the private sector. To do so, a two-pronged approach could be enacted.

First, some existing entry-level options in political work are actually valuable and progressives must identify and continue to support these programs. A good example is the AFL-CIO’s Union Summer, a 10-week summer program in which prospective organizers are paid a weekly stipend to learn the ropes of the union movement, including building coalitions, canvassing neighborhoods, visiting members’ homes and organizing direct actions and public events. After the summer, union leaders assist those that succeed in finding full-time jobs.

Securing funding is the other key to the puzzle. While some progressive organizations have received a needed cash infusion from the likes of George Soros and his allies in the Democracy Alliance, innovative forms of philanthropy focused explicitly on youth development need to be fostered. One of the most promising alternatives is the rise of the Cool Rich Kids Movement.

Originally coined by author and activist Billy Wimsatt, it’s typified by Resource Generation (RG), a national organization that works with wealthy young progressives—most of whom inherited their wealth—to bring about social change through the inventive and responsible use of their own resources. By holding local dinners, a national workshop series and an annual conference, young people of wealth break down stigmas attached to class and teach each other the best ways to support valuable causes.

“We’re not telling people where they should put their money,” says Elspeth Gilmore, the RG program coordinator. “We’re trying to provide a framework and an analysis to be able to support young people who do have wealth and access

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to participate in the conversations about how we can create more sustainable organizations.” To date, 1,000 young people have worked with RG. Building that movement could infuse much-needed life into social justice philanthropy and youth employment development.

But until progressive veterans realize the necessity of this support, organizers like Nelson will be left with a choice: sell-out or squeak by. It’s one that committed young people like her should not be forced to make. ■

What Vacation Days?

Despite being one of the richest nations, America denies its workers mandated paid vacations and sick days

BY DAVID MOBERG

LAST YEAR MARY LOU Eckart took her first vacation in five years, a trip from her home in Decatur, Ill., to see her grandchildren in Florida. But the Illinois state government, which pays her to care for a severely disabled teenage girl, provides her no paid vacation time. So Eckhart took the girl—and her work—with her.

She faces a similar bind if she gets sick. “I just had an incident two weeks ago,” she says. “I had an inner ear infection that I didn’t know about, and I passed out. My 17-year-old daughter covered for me while I recovered. I get no paid vacation, no time off, no sick leave. But if they put these clients in a nursing home, I know that is very expensive. I’d love to have a vacation. I’d love to be able to get away. I’d love to have someone fill in for me. I feel like we deserve more than what we’re getting.”

Eckart’s story is all too common: Nearly one-fourth of American workers have no paid vacation or holidays, according to a recent study from the D.C.-based Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), and nearly half of all private sector workers have no paid sick days. But if Eckart were living in any other industrialized country, she would be legally guaranteed at least two weeks paid vacation and—in 136 countries—from seven to more than 30 paid sick days. The United States is the only rich country that does not mandate paid vacations and paid sick days, and Americans who are afforded such benefits enjoy far less time off than workers in other wealthy nations.

Americans now work more every year, on average, than workers in any other industrialized country (except for a virtual tie with New Zealand). With women working longer hours each year, the average annual work time for a married couple is growing steadily, and fam-



Eight-hour day banner, Melbourne, 1856

ily time—including the crucial bonding experience of vacations—has suffered. Full-time workers in much of Europe typically take seven to eight weeks of vacation and holidays each year—that’s double the American average for full-time workers. Overall, the average private sector worker in the United States gets about nine paid vacation days and six paid holidays each year. Low-paid, part-time or small-business workers typically get far fewer, sometimes none. The same holds for paid sick leave: 72 percent of the highest-paid quarter of private sector workers get paid sick days compared to only 21 percent of workers in the lowest-paid quarter.

Intercontinental disparity

Why do workers in other rich countries have more paid time off? Mainly because laws demand employers provide it. The

European Union requires its members to set a minimum standard of four weeks paid vacation (covering part-time workers as well). Finland and France require six weeks paid vacation, plus additional paid holidays. Most countries require workers to take the time off and employers to give them vacation at convenient times. Some governments even require employers to pay bonuses so workers can afford to do more than sit at home on vacation. On top of that, unions in Europe and other rich industrialized countries—whose contracts cover up to 90 percent of the workforce—typically negotiate additional time off. Meanwhile, the standard workweek is slightly shorter in many European countries, and workers retire earlier with better public pensions.

Until the early ’70s, European and American workers logged similar hours. But the pattern then drastically diverged,

with Europeans getting more vacation time, around the same time that U.S. income inequality began growing. In the United States, corporations gained the upper hand against workers and their declining unions, and the Democratic Party started shifting away from working class concerns. In Europe, stronger unions and left political parties pushed for shorter work hours. In some cases, as jobs were lost when traditional industries restructured or work was outsourced, unions saw reduced work time as a way to share work. But more often, unions were continuing the battle to share wealth in the form of more leisure, which had started a century earlier with the movement for an eight-hour day—the goal of Chicago protestors in May, 1886, that ended in the Haymarket Massacre, repression of the labor movement, and creation of May 1 as the international workers' holiday.

The difference in work hours between the United States and most industrial countries “is exactly a manifestation of the same forces driving broader inequality,” says CEPR economist John Schmitt, pointing to deterioration of the minimum wage, pensions, public services, health insurance and wages under pressure from globalization, deregulation, privatization and attacks on unions. “Workers haven’t been able to translate higher productivity gains into higher pay or benefits, and they’ve been unable to address the time crunch.”

“People in the United States don’t even understand what could be possible on this issue [of paid time off],” Schmitt says. “This is one of the most important ideological victories of the right in the last 30 years—to persuade us we aren’t rich enough to treat workers well. We’re incredibly rich, getting richer every year, and we have plenty of resources to pay adequate wages, pensions, health insurance and vacations, but we’ve chosen to give that money to the top five percent.”

European and other industrialized countries have divided their growing ability to produce differently. For example, Europe has nearly caught up with—and many countries have pulled ahead of—the United States in labor productivity (the output from each hour of work), the key measure of an economy’s potential.

In recent years, however, American workers have rapidly increased the amount of goods and services they produce each

year, in comparison to Europe. These two measurements have largely diverged because Europeans have been enjoying more time away from the job, just as they’ve been enjoying a more egalitarian society.

According to Harvard economist Alberto Alesina, Europeans are happier, and have less stress and insecurity, which is good for health and longevity. Studies in the United States, for exam-

The European Union requires its members to give a minimum of four weeks paid vacation—Finland and France require six weeks. According to studies, Europeans are happier and have less stress.

ple, indicate that taking vacations cuts in half the risk of heart attacks for men. Longer, mandated vacations haven’t undercut the competitiveness of other rich countries, and there’s evidence that they increase labor productivity.

Plus, recent increases in the U.S. gross domestic product haven’t significantly helped most Americans: The super-rich have captured most of the income gains. An accurate calculation of the gross domestic product—subtracting such costs as crime, environmental depredations, militarism and declining social trust—would actually show that growth in economic output has brought few, if any, real gains in welfare for American society. Indeed, CEPR economists David Rosnick and Mark Weisbrot argue that Europe’s shorter work hours help the environment by reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions.

Taking back time

Most Americans would be better off with more paid vacation and leave, but inequality, insecurity and the competitive rat race drives people to work even harder, often just to keep their heads above water. It’s very difficult for individuals to demand more time, even if the limited polling available suggests it would be popular. Major gains will only come from an organized movement and changed laws. One organization, Take Back Your Time, founded by writer and documentary filmmaker John de Graaf, is trying to persuade presidential candidates to support its proposal for mandating three weeks of paid vacation for

all workers. “I think the political figure who would pick up on this issue would find great resonance,” De Graaf says, but so far nobody has.

At this point, more modest proposals have a better chance to succeed. Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) have introduced the Healthy Families Act, which would guarantee seven days of paid leave for all

workers to deal with their own or a family member’s illness. Beyond the obvious help to the individuals who need care, such legislation would help businesses economically. Rather than putting in an unproductive day at work spreading communicable diseases (or sending their sick child to spread illness at a child care center), workers could just stay at home, and it would reduce the employee turnover that results from workers taking off unauthorized, unpaid sick days. Five states have mandatory temporary disability insurance programs to cover income losses from short illnesses, and last November, San Francisco voters approved the first mandated paid sick days in the United States. The Working Families Party in New York is now campaigning for paid leave for new parents and adults caring for ailing relatives, a protection California passed in 2004 (thus strengthening the unpaid family and medical leave federal law provides).

Mandated paid sick days would help workers like Elnora Collins, a home care worker in Chicago. “If you get sick, you go to work sick. If you show up for work, you endanger your patients. If you don’t show up for work, you get no pay. I recently lost a whole day’s pay, because I ended up in a hospital for an overnight stay. It was an anxiety attack, like a heart attack. It’s very frightening. And then, when you look at that paycheck, you really cry.”

Compare the work time and leisure in the United States to that in other rich countries, and we all have good reason to share in her tears. ■

BY PHOEBE CONNELLY

Two Degrees From Devastation

George Monbiot has a challenge for those concerned about global warming: Stop flying. Of all the harmful things you can do to the earth, it's hard to top traveling on a plane. Flying from, say, New York to London emits more than one ton of carbon dioxide per passenger.

Consequently, his current book tour might be the British journalist's last trip to the United States. He's here to promote *Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning*, which argues that the only way to stop the current climate crisis is to cut greenhouse gas emissions 90 percent, starting immediately. The rationale goes like this: If concentrations of carbon dioxide in 2030 remain as great as they are today, the world will likely experience two degrees centigrade of warming above pre-industrial levels. Two degrees is the point at which, he writes, "certain major ecosystems begin collapsing. Having, until then, absorbed carbon dioxide, they release it. Beyond that point, in other words, climate change is out of our hands." In *Heat*, he lays out the science behind this, as well as practicable suggestions for making these cuts.

Monbiot got his start as a journalist, working for a BBC on environmental programs in the late '80s. That led to two investigative books about the environmental injustices he witnessed around the globe. In 1995, he was awarded a United Nations Global 500 Award for Outstanding Environmental Achievement. He writes a weekly column for the (U.K.) *Guardian*, and blogs at monbiot.com and turnuptheheat.org.

You start each chapter of *Heat* with a quote from Faust. Why?

Ever since I first became interested in climate change 20 years ago, there was something nagging in the back of my

mind. I'd heard this story before and I couldn't pin it down; I just couldn't. And then one night I was trying to get to sleep, but my brain was racing too fast, and it suddenly came to me. It was Faust. Both Doctor Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's version, and Faust in Goethe's version could be metaphors for climate change.

What's the difference between the two?

In Marlowe's version, Doctor Faustus strikes a deal with the devil that if he can have 24 years living in luxuriousness, the devil can then have his soul. He prepares himself for this by denying that hell exists, and at the end, he's carried off.

Faust is humankind—always striving, curious, restless, never satisfied, wanting to discover more, to explore more, to consume more, create more, destroy more. He is all of us. And, indeed, Marlowe intended that he is all of us.

The years in which he can live in all voluptuousness are the years of extraordinary freedom that we have been granted by fossil fuels; to do things which previous generations have only dreamt of doing; to have magical powers very similar to Faust's powers.

Now in Goethe's version, Faust strikes his bargain with the devil, but it's a slightly different bargain. He says, "You can have my soul after 24 years, but on one condition: only if I become complacent and smug, and stop striving and stop questioning."

So he begins by living in all voluptuousness, getting everything he wants,

the wine, the women, the amazing food and the power to astonish people. He enjoys all that for a few years, and he thinks, "I'm wasting these extraordinary diabolical powers that I have been granted. I ought use them for the good of human kind. I want to create better conditions for people to live in." And he strives to use these powers—fossil fuels, in my reading—to create a world that didn't require diabolical powers, in which everybody could be comfortable without having to call on the devil.

What is your opinion of corporate-friendly environmental actions like carbon offsets?

There are several problems with them, but the most fundamental one is this: We have very, very little time to deal with this problem. Carbon cuts made today are much more valuable in terms of staving off this problem than a carbon cut made in the future. If you cut the carbon today, you're less likely to have run-away climate change: climate change that causes more climate change.

That is the "two degrees more" problem you discuss?

Two degrees above the pre-industrial level is when we're really in the danger zone. Two degrees centigrade that is, so about 3.6 Fahrenheit. Beyond that point, the biosphere, the world's natural system, stops being an absorber of greenhouse gases and starts to produce far more carbon dioxide and methane than it does today. What I mean is that if you get to two degrees, three degrees becomes an inevitability. Once you hit three degrees, then four degrees becomes an inevitability. Beyond two degrees, we wash our hands of the problem because it's out of our hands, and we can't do anything about it.

Are there still scientists today debating the inevitability of two degrees?



Don't let the smile fool you: George Monbiot brings the bad news on climate change.

Or is there a consensus on this matter?

I'm glad you asked this because people are giving up on two degrees because they see it as too difficult now. They're not giving up because there is a scientific reason to give up; they're giving up because there are political reasons to give up. Lately it's been, "Well, we hope that if we keep emissions down to this certain level, we won't go beyond three degrees." Wait a minute! Three degrees is a disaster! We cannot have three degrees! The EU, the British government and other governments have all been saying two degrees is the point beyond which we cannot go. And yet silently, they've all dropped that as a target. What I've done in my book is show this is realistic, that we can do this.

All this brings me back to the question of carbon offsets. Given that we have to make these cuts as quickly as possible, offsetting is an absolute disaster. If you pay an offset company to wash away your environmental sins and reabsorb that carbon by some other means, whether it's by planting a tree or by changing light bulbs in Jamaica or altering waste compacting process in South Africa—whatever it might be—that will take years to mature.

So you're swapping what could have been a carbon cut today, with a possible carbon cut in the future. That is a bad swap. When it comes to something like tree planting it can take 16 years.

In the book you examine the problem with tree planting offsets.

Tree planting, anywhere other than the tropics, now turns out to actually be counterproductive.

Don't tell that to the school kids. They're planting trees all over.

Don't get me wrong—we should be planting trees! I love trees! But it's not going to stop climate change. Not as a carbon offset. And the reason for this, unfortunately, is that trees are darker than other land—during the summer—they absorb more heat. They actually encourage further planetary warming. In the tropics, that's not the case because of the hydrological cycling of the water.

It's a similar effect to what we're seeing in the Arctic with the disappearance of the ice. As the ice disappears, you have a white surface giving way to a dark surface, which is the sea, and it absorbs more heat, which is why the Arctic warms two

or three times as fast as the rest of the planet. So, these tree planting schemes are just not going to work.

You've sworn off air travel, but you have family that lives far away.

I have a sister that lives in Nairobi. And it's tough because I've decided that I can't go and visit her. She does come to Britain about twice a year. I'd like to see her much more than that, not least because we have a baby and they get along very well together. I'm very sorry about it, but I can't reconcile it in my conscience.

Do you think that traveling to see loved ones is less reprehensible than business travel?

A little bit. I cannot say to people, "You cannot see your family." Believe me, it's an extraordinary paradox that the world could be destroyed by love. Of all the things! Hatred, greed, fear, it's very easy to see how the world could be destroyed by those things. This is a problem of morality. We need a whole new morality, a morality that we're completely unaccustomed to.

Do you think we'll actually manage to change course?

Yes. It's remarkable how few people have been campaigning on climate change until now. It's also interesting to see how people have gone from the position of being in total denial that anything needs to be done, to total despair that nothing can be done, with no in-between. You would have thought there would have been this evolution from, "It's not happening," to, "Oh my God, it's happening, we need to do something." It's much tougher to say, "It's not too late." That means you've got to do something about it. And that's a far tougher challenge than throwing up your hands in despair and tearing your hair out. Anyone can do that.

Reading *Heat*, Naomi Klein says you have "a relentless faith in people."

Yes, it's sometimes taxing. But I'm always struck by the incredible diversity of human skills and human determination, and of the will to overcome adversity. It's amazing what some people manage to do from the most unpromising beginnings. If we can tap into some of that collective genius of humanity there's nothing we can't do. We really can turn this around. But it's going to be quite tough. ■



The documentary *NO!* chips away at the myths and silence surrounding sexual assault in the black community.

SCHERAZADE TILLET

BY CYNTHIA GREENLEE-DONNELL

Stories of Survival

Filmmaker Aishah Shahidah Simmons didn't miss a beat when a white, female student told her at a 2003 Boston College screening of her documentary *NO!*, "Until I saw your film, I didn't know that black women could be raped." Simmons,

a Philadelphia resident, calmly asked the young woman why she believed such a thing. The student replied that she didn't think black women, simultaneously praised and pilloried for their strength, would stand for such a violation—as if sexual-violence victims are able to negotiate with attackers or deter them with a hefty serving of attitude.

That wasn't the case with Simmons, now 38, who was sexually assaulted in 1989, when she was a 19-year-old Temple University sophomore on a foreign exchange program to Mexico. A clandestine date—outside the dorm and the curfew hours—turned into a rape that left her pregnant and so devastated that she dropped out of college. Nor was that the case with the women whose stories Simmons has included in *NO!*, which explores rape within the African-American community.

Among them is a woman who was raped by her mentor, the university's highest ranking black administrator; another whose fraternity boyfriend wouldn't take no for an answer; and yet another who struggles with bulimia decades after her first boyfriend beat and raped her after she refused to have sex outside.

For Simmons, *NO!* has been a labor of love to make the film she wanted, regardless of how long it took. Simmons began filming interviews in 1994 with co-producer Tamara Xavier, but the documentary wasn't released until 2006, largely because of the struggle to find \$300,000 in necessary funding.

With *NO!*, Simmons hopes to chip away at the myths and disquieting silence surrounding sexual assault in the black community, which has traditionally been so attuned to racism outside that it has

largely turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to gender violence within.

"There's this notion," says Simmons, "that when black women come forward [and say they've been raped], that we're a traitor to the race. I wanted to show these women, their faces, their names. I understand privacy and shame, but shame should be on the perpetrators."

Simmons followed the case of Desiree Washington, the beauty queen who accused boxer Mike Tyson of raping her in 1991 in his hotel room. (Tyson served three years in prison.) Then came the campaign to "save" Tyson and discredit Washington—complete with T-shirts proclaiming his innocence. In *NO!*, Simmons includes footage of Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan asking what Washington expected when she went to Tyson's room as other faith leaders cackle in agreement.

Simmons wondered why those leaders and others never acknowledged that rape isn't typically a crime committed by a stranger and that, for most black women, the perpetrator is an acquaintance who looks like them. The lack of critical reaction from the black community in the wake of the Washington case, combined with a 1994 trip to South Africa, where she met activists working on issues of sexual assault, galvanized her to make *NO!*. It is estimated that as many as half of all South African women will be raped in their lifetimes.

American women are also vulnerable to sexual assault. According to a study by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control, one in every six U.S. women will be subjected to sexual assault or an attempted assault during her lifetime. The organization's "Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey" estimates that 18.8 percent of black women will survive a rape or attempted rape—making them only slightly more likely than the general population (17.6 percent) and white women (17.7 percent) to experience such a crime, but much less likely to be raped than Native Americans.

Numbers alone don't express the full extent of rape or sexual assault in the black community—a topic that has probably been discussed more extensively in novels such as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* than in real life. Black women must deal with competing interests—protecting one's self versus protecting the image of

black men in a society where black men are the usual suspects of sexual crimes, facing the distrust of the police versus the need for personal security—that reduce the chance they will report rape.

With the help of anthropologist and former Spelman College President Johnnetta Cole, historian Bev-

sonal testimonies—didn't happen. The audience members acknowledged the violence, but their comments and lack of emotion told her that they couldn't relate to this type of violence.

Wilson told the audience, "I can watch a Lifetime movie with a cast full of white people and cry because I'm conditioned

In a country built on slavery, which was predicated on controlling black reproduction, black women have been regarded as perpetually sexually available or 'unrapeable.'

erly Guy-Sheftall and former Black Panther Elaine Brown, *NO!* examines the historical forces that foster sexual violence—and suppress dialogue about it—in black communities. In a country built on slavery, which was predicated on control of black labor and reproduction, black women have been regarded as perpetually sexually available or "unrapeable." They have never fit easily into the "good girl" mold.

"I realized that I couldn't talk about sexual assault in the African-American community without talking about slavery," says Simmons. "If somebody owns you, how do you have the right to consent?"

NO! is generating discussion within the black community. In 2003, writer Kevin Powell (who is black) showed an unfinished cut to a crowd of hundreds—including many African-American men—on a wintry Friday night in Harlem. Men are a vital part of the solution, says Nia Wilson, the associate director of Spirit House, an arts and cultural nonprofit in Durham, N.C. "This is not about going after black men," she says. "This is about uncovering something we need to address, and we need to address it together. Men are the only ones who can stop rape, no matter what we say, no matter how much light we shine on it."

Wilson, who is black and a sexual-violence survivor, is also a member of UBUNTU, a coalition that combats racism and violence. Simmons allowed UBUNTU to use *NO!* to foster dialogue around North Carolina. Wilson recalls a screening for a white audience that was disengaged from the topic. All of the reactions Wilson had learned to expect—tears, outrage, per-

to relate to you. But you are not conditioned to relate to me. You, especially this group who thinks you're so politically correct, you cannot watch a movie with people with brown skin and see yourself."

Bryan Proffitt, a 28-year-old white schoolteacher and UBUNTU member, says that talking about rape and race requires starting from a framework that acknowledges a history of interracial violence, white supremacy, male domination and myths that need debunking. "There's always a good bit of anxiety about how white folks are going to see this film. 'Oh, look, black guys are rapists. We knew that.' We've always tried to be careful of framing this film beforehand because we recognize that white people come in with that particular narrative and we want to challenge that before they see it."

Before each screening, the UBUNTU facilitator reads a statement that lists 27 reasons the film is being shown, including: "Because the stories of survivors of sexual assault are powerful and sacred." "Because there are survivors here." "Because this film holds us all accountable for the world that we comply with and perpetuate."

This April, *NO!* was selected as a featured resource by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. "Everywhere I've shown the film," says Simmons, "someone comes up and discloses she's a survivor. I could be the only black woman in the room—me and the women on the film—in Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, women stand up and say, 'This is my story.' " ■

For more information on *NO!*, visit www.notherapedocumentary.org.

BOOKS

Iran and America's Tug of War

By Robert S. Eshelman

AS THE BUSH administration boosts its military presence in the Middle East and issues frequent, pointed barbs at Tehran, which in turn quickens the pace of its nuclear enrichment program, two new books examine the object of the administration's hostility.

In *Iran Oil: The New Middle East Challenge to America* (IB Taurus, 2006), British journalist Roger Howard offers a sober analysis of Iran's threat to American power, albeit one that has nothing to do with its nuclear ambitions. "Iran's contemporary challenge to the United States," he writes, "represents an explosive tension between politics and resources." Howard argues that by seeking to isolate Iran through U.S. and U.N.-backed sanctions, the United States forces nations to choose between backing its fight against Iran and future access to the Islamic Republic's flush reserves of oil and natural gas. As global demand for hydrocarbons increases, he predicts energy-hungry nations will choose the latter.

Only Saudi Arabia, Canada and, perhaps, Iraq have greater oil reserves, and only Russia has more plentiful supplies of natural gas. Additionally, Iran's energy sector offers lucrative investment opportunities to foreign companies that can lend a hand in repairing its aging production facilities, in tapping new fields, and delivering oil and gas to the world market.

The future energy needs and investment opportunities of U.S. political allies—particularly Britain, France, Germany, Japan and Pakistan—are linked, to varying degrees, to Iran. Japan, for example, possesses few energy resources and imports much of its oil from Iran. Recently, it secured a stake in Iran's enormous Azadegan oil field. Despite some domestic oil production, Pakistan imports more than 80 percent of its energy supply and, since the '90s, has pursued a massive pipeline project that would deliver natural gas from Iran and, potentially, into India as well. Eu-



In May 2007, an Iranian woman walks past the former U.S. embassy in Tehran.

ropean-based companies are also linked to Iran's energy sector.

Policy differences at the United Nations between the United States and its allies bear out Iran's particular challenge to American power. While Washington has taken a tough stance vis-à-vis Iran, its allies, particularly in Europe, have taken a markedly less aggressive position. Howard dismisses the view that these differences represent a good-cop, bad-cop strategy. Such a characterization, he says, "disguises not just its accidental quality but, more specifically, also the strength of the political disagreements between the different capitals."

By seeking to isolate Iran, Howard argues, the United States drives a wedge between itself and its allies, while at the same time U.S. adversaries forge strong economic ties to Iran. China's leading source of oil is Iran, and Russia has secured contracts to improve Iran's energy infrastructure and to assist in the development of its nuclear enrichment program.

According to Howard, if the United States continues its strident reproach of Iran, it will be "writing several paragraphs of its own obituary."

While Howard's analysis of U.S. foreign policy portends its demise, Hamid Dabashi, the Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, surveys 200 years of Iranian political history and culture, and offers a frequently punchy attack on contemporary American politics.

In *Iran: A People Interrupted* (The New

Press, 2007), Dabashi turns rigid binaries such as "East and West" and "modernity and tradition" on their heads. He puts it this way: "I [wrote] this book to persuade people to discard the clichéd categorization of Iran as a country caught between a belligerent tradition and an alien modernity, and to adopt a more historically nuanced, culturally multifaceted, and materially grounded reading of Iran."

As a point of departure, Dabashi rails against boosters of United States power such as Samuel Huntington, author of *The Clash of Civilizations*, and Francis Fukuyama, who famously declared the end of history. "While Fukuyama seeks to strike out all alternative historical narratives, for they give nations narrations with which to puncture the inflated hubris of empires," Dabashi says, "Huntington reduces the very same nations and their unpredictable revolts and resistances to a handful of fabricated civilizational categories in order better to manage their rebellions against globalized tyranny." Dabashi rebuts Fukuyama's hubris and Huntington's fabrications by way of Iran's past and the particular struggles of its peoples today.

Dabashi's historiography begins in the early-19th century, when Britain and Russia secured military footholds and lucrative oil concessions from Qajar kings. In response, a shaky coalition of clerics, merchants and peasants launched the Constitutional Revolt of 1906–1911, demanding greater political accountability and an end to foreign plunder. Dabashi argues that Iran's lit-

erary and intellectual figures of that period created a “literary imagination” and a “critical consciousness” that gave shape to these efforts.

He then examines the oscillations of the 20th century Pahlavi Dynasty; the rise of secular leftist movements connected to international struggles; America’s 1953 overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq; and the wave of terror unleashed by Muhammad Reza Shah’s brutal domestic security force, beginning in the late ’50s. Dabashi describes these years as a period of “fear of the tyranny that ruled a people with systemic mendacity, and the ecstasy of dreaming what was possible beyond it.” And, as with his examination of the Constitutional Revolt, he describes a flourishing of creative expression that was both informed by these events and gave a voice to Iranian social movements.

In discussing the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Dabashi describes the stark social and class divisions between rural and urban populations, as well as those that separated merchants and the poor from

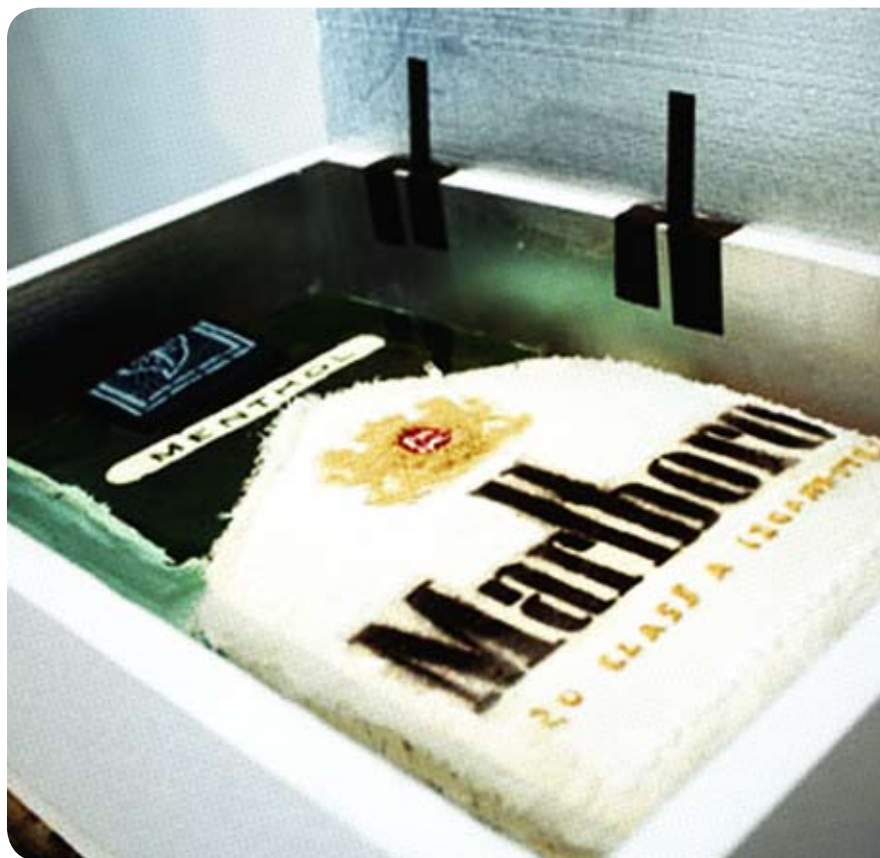
elites and an emerging middle class. Importantly, he describes how the Shia religious establishment overtook leftist and nationalist movements in articulating opposition to the Shah and foreign meddling in Iran, thus setting the stage for the ouster of the Shah and the ascension of the Ayatollah to power.

Turning to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s election, Dabashi highlights class dynamics. “The two candidates who received the most votes ... stood for the most basic and crudest cases of class division,” he says. “[T]he middle-class, upwardly mobile, Yuppie International, and the Eurocentric voters opted for Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, while the poor, the disenfranchised, those heavily dependent on state social subsidies, and the religiously more pious voted for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.” Those that voted for Ahmadinejad, Dabashi points out, were in large part the same Iranians that Rafsanjani and his successor Mohammad Khatami overlooked in their economic and social reforms in the ’90s.

Ahmadinejad’s election represents the resurgence of the hard-lined clerical class, but their power is buoyed by the fears in Iran that Tehran may be the next American military target. One gives rise to and strengthens the other. “There is a belligerent tribalism,” he says, “linking the most recalcitrant clerics in Iran to the most obstinate neocons in Washington, D.C.” This may best be described as a downward spiral, rather than merely a vicious circle.

Howard depicts the bankruptcy of the Bush administration’s Iran policy, which is, in part, based on the notions that Dabashi opposes. The ideological binaries promoted by the likes of Huntington and Fukuyama continue to inform many American policy makers, despite their abject failure in Iraq and the never-ending war on terror. For Howard, this mindset is the primary obstacle to American rapprochement with Iran. Worse, as Dabashi points out, it forecloses the histories and agencies of peoples the world over and escalates the possibility of unthinkable peril. ■

[art space]



Product Placement

Packard Jennings expresses his ideological dissent through carefully crafted visual gags. Jennings’ “dissemination art” intends to provoke and engage the American public in its consumption and civic passivity.

The Oakland, Calif., artist’s projects include bus benches emblazoned with anti-advertising slogans like “you don’t need it”; a line of “fallen rapper” (Tupac Shakur, Biggie Smalls and Eazy-E) PEZ prototypes; and a giant ice cream cake in the shape of a Marlboro cigarette pack made entirely from the ingredients of Philip Morris subsidiary products.

View a gallery of Jennings’ work and download the makings for several of his projects at <http://centennialsociety.com/durham.html>.

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BOOKS

Forget the Foundations

By Jeanine Plant

WHILE WORKING in a hospital in the '70s near the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, Lorelei Decora, noticed that many women were having miscarriages—so many that hospital workers had to put extra beds in the hallways. Meanwhile, Madonna Thunder Hawk was working with continuously sick children at the Survival School, an American Indian Movement (AIM) alternative school, which supports Native American values of sovereignty and self-determination. The two began to suspect a larger problem: water pollution from local uranium mining. So they decided to take action, and founded Women of All Red Nations (WARN).

Their "actions" didn't involve writing grant proposals, discussing their concerns with a board of directors or contacting state agencies. They tested water samples themselves, and, in 1979, produced a study revealing high levels of radioactive contamination, a high percentage of pregnancies complicated by excessive bleeding or terminated in abortion and large numbers of children born with birth defects. Despite their work, the Centers for Disease Control and Indian Health Services discredited the study, and WARN wasn't vindicated until the South Dakota School of Mines substantiated their claims that same year.

But unlike *Erin Brockovich*, this tale of local activists fighting against faceless institutions doesn't have a happy ending: The Nuclear Regulatory Commission simply raised the level of "acceptable contamination," and Indian Health Services started providing bottled water in one area. Congress authorized a new water pipeline to the reservation in 2002—only to have the funding diverted by the financial demands of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Hawk writes about this experience in the throw-down-the-gauntlet anthology, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (South End Press, 2006). Edited by In-cite! Women of Color Against Violence—

a Redmond, Wash.-based collective of feminists of color founded in 2000—these 16 essays examine how nonprofit fundraising hinders radical movements, the complicated role played by foundations and grassroots organizing.

Hawk's story is an example of the activism *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* champions, one unhampered by the 501(c)(3) nonprofit system beholden to boards and budget salaries. "Organizations today," Hawk writes, "spend more time on fundraising and administration than they do on organizing. In contrast, we put all of our effort into organizing and activism."

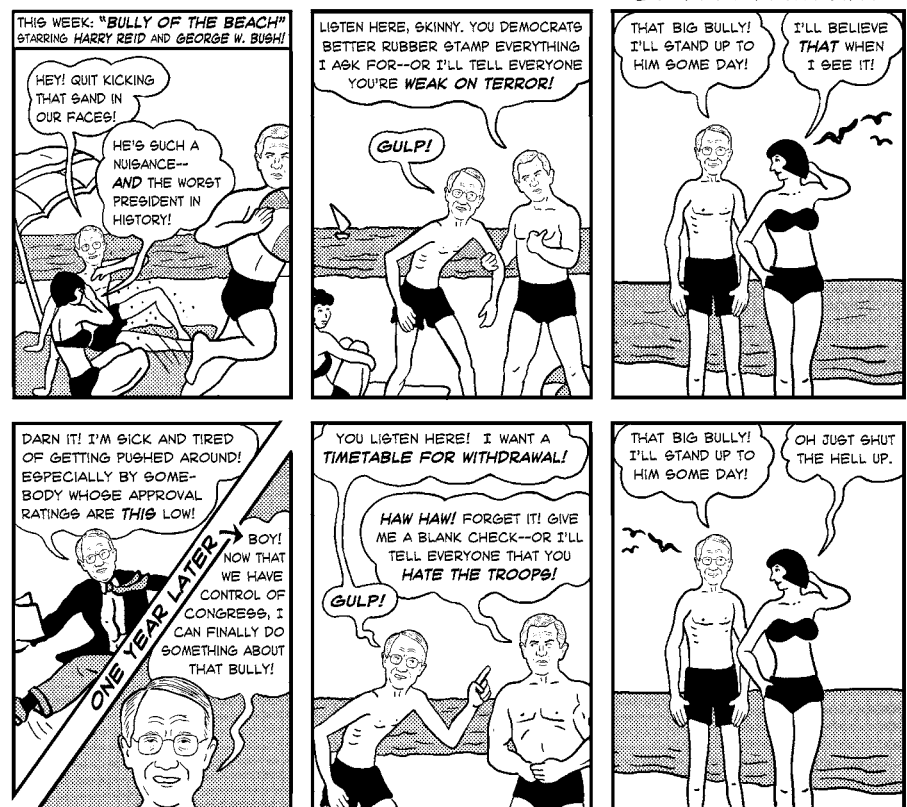
Nostalgic for the days when "people organized to make change," Hawk casts a harsh eye on careerist humanitarians who won't work without a paycheck and who defer responsibility onto do-nothing organizations, only later to complain about their lack of agency. She deflects criticism that WARN could have accomplished more had it worked within the confines of a typical nonprofit. Hawk says: "We did not worry if our work would upset funders; we just worried about whether the work would help our communities."

The authors in this collection argue that today's activists are a conformist bunch. Since the late '70s, American social-justice organizations have operated within the 501(c)(3) nonprofit model in which donations are tax-deductible and foundation grants can be secured. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* argues that foundations perpetuate First World interests and free-market capitalism, thus preserving many of the problems radical activists wish to eradicate, such as the unregulated concentration of wealth.

Foundations were created in the early 20th century by multimillionaire robber barons, such as John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, to evade corporate and estate taxes. By the early '60s, foundations were growing at a rate of 1,200 annually, and financial magazines were touting them as tax-shelter mechanisms. The problem, as Christine E. Ahn argues in "Democratizing American Philanthropy," is that foundations divert money away from the collective tax base. Monies that would have become public funds are instead private, controlled by trustees who benefit from the status quo and who are more interested in sup-

THIS MODERN WORLD

BY TOM TOMORROW



porting milquetoast reformers than social-justice organizations. Due in part to this lack of tax dollars, federal and state funding for education and healthcare has shrunk, shifting the social responsibility from government to philanthropy. Ahn writes that an estimated 45 percent of the \$500 billion foundations possess rightfully belongs to the American public. This is a culture of noblesse oblige, Ahn writes, where the “privileged are obliged to help those less fortunate, without examining how that wealth was created or the dangerous implications of conceding such power to the wealthy.”

One problematic consequence of this concentration of wealth, violence-prevention educator Paul Kivel suggests in his essay “Social Service or Social Change?” is the power those with money wield over community leaders. “The ruling class co-opts leaders from our communities,” Kivel writes, “by providing them with jobs in non-profits and government agencies, consequently realigning their interests (i.e., maintaining their jobs) with maintaining the system.” This allegiance keeps community leaders from challenging the root causes of social inequities—the social-change work—at the same time that they pedal to keep up by providing for the needs of individuals devastated by institutional exploitation. Kivel concedes this is valuable work, but points out the inherent injustice of this paradigm: “When temporary shelter becomes a substitute for permanent housing, emergency food a substitute for a decent job ... we have shifted our attention from the redistribution of wealth to the temporary provision of social services to keep people alive.”

Such statements might give the impression that these contributors are unrealistic; but they’re not. In her essay “In the Shadow of the Shadow State,” University of Southern California Professor Ruth Wilson Gilmore urges contemporary grassroots activists to stop seeking a “pure way of doing things.” “Many are looking for an organizational structure and a resource capability that will somehow be impervious to co-optation,” she writes. But grassroots activism, like foundation grants, can and has been used by the right. After all, it was a women-led, grassroots effort in California that helped elect Ronald Reagan governor and Richard Nixon president.

excerpt

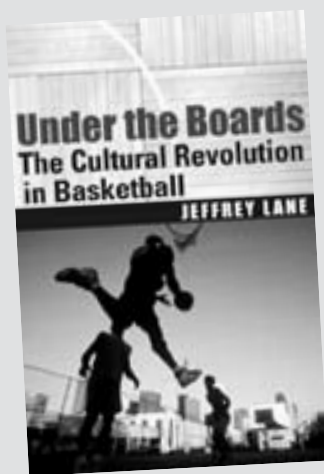


Acting Street

In his first book, Under the Boards: The Cultural Revolution in Basketball, Jeffrey Lane examines the rise of basketball culture over the past 30 years. Here he asks what it means for the NBA to both embrace and shun the hip-hop aesthetic.

From the NBA’s vantage point, it doesn’t matter if a connection exists between baggy clothing and criminality. According to Virginia Postrel, author of *The Substance of Style*, now more than ever consumers make purchases based on their aesthetic response to a product. Whether it is the lead performer in a play or an espresso machine, a customer invests in items that have the “right” appearance because of the values that customer intrinsically attaches to them. In an arena where many ticket buyers are higher-income white men in their mid-forties, the goal of the NBA as a business is to cater to the tastes of such ticket buyers and to attract companies advertising products aimed at this demographic. If these consumers, cognizant of their reactions or not, see a criminal when they see Carmelo Anthony of the Denver Nuggets on the sidelines in a flat-brimmed New Era cap, oversized white T-shirt, and droopy jeans, then it makes business-sense to adjust his appearance.

In acting as a profit-minded enterprise, does the NBA advance a racist conflation between hip-hop clothing and violence that is not only unfounded but that also antagonizes the black labor force responsible for much of its financial success? Is the NBA affirming a devastating stereotype of the black male as a societal menace? Then again, isn’t hip-hop in all of its incarnations—fashion surely included—about being provocative and undermining authority? Are the players ... doing it to themselves? Regardless, the NBA is clearly guilty of having it both ways: It chastises players for looking or acting “too street,” while it manipulates and sells their street-bred swagger for all it’s worth and cashes in on the celebration of its players and iconography in mainstream hip-hop.



The concluding essay—written by Nicole Burrowes and others from the Brooklyn-based Sista II Sista collective (SIIS), a non-profit that promotes community for young Black and Latina women—makes the strongest case for the feasibility of grassroots organizing. After 9/11, when the political climate became increasingly conservative, SIIS started asking “the hard questions,” about the necessity of raising \$300,000 annually from grants. In the transitioning from foundation support to a volunteer collective reliant solely on grassroots dollars, SIIS lost a few people. But it has grown in unexpected

ways, fielding more requests for program development than the collective can handle. Yet the opportunity proved golden: “Young women have stepped up and their leadership is more prominent than ever.”

“We are not saying all foundations are bad,” the Sistas write. “But once the chase for foundation dollars begins to seriously affect your direction and your energy, something has to change.” No longer trapped in an endless application process, they’re able to focus most of their energy on building up their community in a way that would make Hawk proud. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Food Poisoning for Thought



IF A COUNTRY executes people who murder close-up with guns or knives, it should also put to death officials and executives who kill at a polite distance by knowingly approving and selling lethal products.

For all its faults as the world's high-executioner state, China picked an equal-opportunity victim in Zheng Xiaoyu, former head of the State Food and Drug Administration. Lamentably, he was convicted of corruption, not murder. He took bribes to approve licenses for foods and drugs that killed consumers, including babies.

When the greed and corruption of U.S. corporate and government leaders kill, we rarely punish those responsible, and never with the severity meted out to "real" criminals.

While recent headlines about China spotlight deadly pet food, toxic toothpaste and contaminated fish, U.S. supermarkets feature domestic chicken teeming with salmonella, and poisonous spinach and peanut butter, along side foods rich in antibiotics, hormones and pesticides.

One U.S. firm added melamine, the plastic that Chinese manufacturers used to adulterate pet food ingredients. When Colorado-based Uniscope tested the resin it buys to bind its fish, shrimp and livestock feed pellets, it found melamine and reported it. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) responded with a "voluntary recall," also noting that both the resin supplier, Ohio-based Tembec, and Uniscope were using urea formaldehyde, a suspected carcinogen. The FDA promised "action if warranted."

Illnesses from slow-acting carcinogens, toxins and residual drugs aside, 76 million Americans contract a food-

borne illness each year, 325,000 require hospitalization and 5,000 die, according to the Centers for Disease Control. In China, where "mass food poisonings involving tainted food products are common," according to the *New York Times*, the toll is higher.

The similarities between China and the United States extend to matching sets of revolving doors. The condemned Zheng rose to head the regulatory agency after two decades at state-run drug companies.

Former U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Ann Veneman was once a director of the biotech company Calgene (eaten by Monsanto which was swallowed by Pharmacia). Her predecessor Dan Glickman's door swung the other way. After heading USDA, he took a lucrative job at a major D.C. lobbying and law firm that advises clients he previously regulated.

Conflict of interest also shares a cross-cultural bond. Many Chinese officials have a financial or career stake in the profitability of the state-run industries they oversee.

In the United States, campaign contributions and financial investments make for more subtle corruption, but both the USDA and the FDA, its weak and chronically underfunded partner, are in thrall to industry interests. After Lester Crawford resigned as FDA head in 2005, he pleaded guilty to lying and conflict-of-interest charges over stock he and his wife owned in companies his FDA regulated.

The USDA has a built-in conflict of interest the size of a silo: Its legal mandate includes the often-clashing goals of promoting the meat industry and protecting the public. While it has a bigger budget and more enforcement clout than the FDA, it lacks any authority to regulate the farms where meat and poultry hazards begin.

Both Chinese and American consumers are sick and sick of it. "We

used to love buying home-made honey from the peasants in villages outside of Beijing, but now we are scared," Feng Xiaohua, a weekend mountaineer, told InterPress Service. "We are probably wrong though, because it is the corrupt officials we have to fear and not the poor peasants."

Vermont recently came down on the side of the "peasants," becoming the first state to allow uninspected chickens raised on small farms to be served in restaurants. Given a choice between an uninspected, home-raised hen and a USDA-approved factory chicken, Vermonters are happy to bet the farm on the nearby farmer.

Domestic food and drug safety is supposed to be protected by 15 federal agencies, with the herniated FDA and the USDA doing the heavy lifting. The FDA oversees 80 percent of U.S. food; the USDA regulates meat and poultry.

Sounds simple? Consider your lunch: The FDA has jurisdiction over your cheese pizza, but add pepperoni and the USDA rules. In cases of dangerous food contamination, except for baby formula, neither agency has the power to order a recall. Instead they rely on the cooperation of companies, which often stroll through their records and issue recalls long after the food is consumed. With the pet food scandal, months passed between contamination and recall. What's more, consumers were astonished to discover that rather than being destroyed, some of the melamine-contaminated chow entered the human food chain—fed to dinner-table bound pigs, chickens and farmed fish.

As for advocating the death penalty rather than stiff jail sentences for government and corporate officials who are knowingly push deadly food and drugs, I was kidding. They'd probably end up in the food supply. ■

CONTACT Terry J. Allen at tallen@igc.org

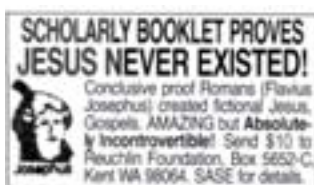
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Crosshairs

Continued from back page

sphere. I wanted to draw people in by doing something playful. But then when all the people left, the shooting continued.”

After two and a half weeks of confinement in a simulated bedroom/office in FlatFile Galleries, Bilal was suffering ear and chest pain, sleep deprivation and overall stress from the constant ear-shattering blast of the gas-powered paintball gun, which he has maxed out his credit cards to supply with new balls.

The 40-year-old professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago is no stranger to physical hardship and political tension. In Iraq, he was arrested as a dissident under Saddam Hussein’s regime. Because a member of his family had been accused of disloyalty to the regime, he was not allowed to study art at the university. When Hussein demanded “volunteers” to attack Kuwait, Bilal infuriated officials by refusing. He began organizing with opposition groups and spending time with dissident artists who painted anti-authoritarian calligraphy on walls at night.

“There was so much fear, you couldn’t even talk to your brother or sister—the saying was that the walls had ears,” he says. “You could make a simple joke and end up disappeared and tortured. There were a lot of people fighting the regime, but it was so brutal it didn’t make any difference. A whole village could be disappeared.”

Bilal fled Iraq in 1991 and spent two years in a Saudi refugee camp. There, he scrapped together supplies to paint and teach children art in a studio he built out of adobe with a plastic-sheeting window.

“We realized we weren’t going to leave any time soon,” he says. “We were given tents to live in, and the desert has no mercy when storms come.”

In late 1992, Bilal came to the United States and studied art at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, where he lived until moving to Chicago. In 2005, his 21-year-old brother, whom Bilal describes as “apolitical,” was killed by shrapnel as he stepped outside the family’s home in Najaf. Soon after, Bilal’s father died. It was then the idea for “Domestic Tension,” which he originally considered calling “Shoot an Iraqi,” began to brew. (He later decided that name would be too incendiary.) A news story about a U.S. soldier sitting in Colorado firing missiles in Iraq cemented

his desire to showcase the technological, remote aspect of modern war. He said his family thinks he’s “crazy.”

“I tell them, ‘Desperate times require desperate measures,’ and this is a desperate time for Iraqis, and Americans too.”

The number of shots skyrocketed after his story was reported on the sarcastic, vaguely political website Digg.com. The majority of comments posted were hostile

‘I learned all these new things about myself. I learned that I was a nigger, and a sand nigger. That I was gay. Part of it is demonization, then you can justify trying to shoot me.’

and aggressive. Some complained bitterly when Bilal left the space for a few minutes or when the server went down. “Dude get a decent server so we can play some Waffa [sic] Ball!” wrote one. And another, “Too bad we can’t waterboard him.”

People who posted comments with a political message or just pleading for more sympathy for Bilal were attacked and called “jihadist sympathizers.”

“I learned all these new things about myself. I learned I was a nigger, and a sand nigger. That I was gay. Part of it is demonization, then you can justify trying to shoot me.”

Meanwhile, participants on his own blog, where Bilal made daily updates through YouTube videos, carried on their own dialogues.

“It varied from hardcore politics to people trying to date each other,” he laughs. “They’d exchange email addresses and then disappear from the site. The Internet user has such a short attention span, this story has been reborn so many times. The other day there was a spike from Canada and Switzerland. I said, ‘Why is Switzerland shooting, you guys are supposed to be neutral.’ They said, ‘We saw it on the news.’”

Many participants were obsessed with trying to shoot out his one light—“this symbol of hope,” Bilal calls it. When he brought a small potted tree into the room, it became an immediate target.

“People do go after the tree, so I stand in front of it and let them hit me.”

Bilal’s previous work has taken a similarly unconventional, dynamic and interactive approach to challenging viewers to think about war and repression. His installation “Sorrow of Baghdad” includes footage of a well-dressed boar sitting in an easy chair

with desert sand and oil wells at his feet, laughing at videos of destruction in Iraq. Bilal’s website explains: “The boar represents big business literally running wild for ever-larger profits, while these corporate leaders do not care who is hurt.”

In New Mexico, health officials shut down his exhibit “Raze 213,” which subjected viewers to the stench of a piece of meat decaying in acid, a reference to

a common torture under Hussein in which a prisoner would be held under a network of pipes dripping nitric acid at random times and places.

His coming works will highlight the human effects of the Iraq war. In August in San Francisco, he will recreate rooms from real destroyed Iraqi houses, covered in a layer of ash, including that from human remains. He also hopes to hold an exhibit wherein a Middle Eastern family stands in a room for the viewing public to scrutinize like animals in a zoo.

While Bilal considers himself a political artist, he abhors the dogmatic approach. “Someone once said art was a hammer, but we get so alienated when it’s used like a hammer that it’s not effective,” he says. “You have to understand the culture and use it to reach them. People use the Internet and people are looking for something to bring them together and occupy their time, so this [installation] pulls them in and later you engage them.”

Matt Schmid, a former Marine, dropped by the gallery to bring Bilal a new lamp after his was shot to shards. “I know a lot of service members who aren’t interested in art galleries, but if I tell them to go online and shoot this paintball gun, they’ll look it up,” he says. “When you’re in the Marines you’re supposed to support the cause. If you’re fighting in combat, you can’t think about who that person is or if they have a family. This gives you a different view of the war.”

“Art doesn’t have to change life, it just has to start something,” Bilal says. “It’s a success if that simple encounter gives birth to conversation. No matter what people think, they will come out of this encounter changed.” ■

IN THE CROSSHAIRS

BY KARI LYDERSEN

WHEN IRAQI ARTIST WAFAA Bilal decided to sequester himself in a Chicago art gallery for 42 days with a paintball gun that people could aim and fire at him over the Internet, he thought he might get a few shots per day. He never guessed that by day 20, more than 40,000 shots would be fired and that hackers would program the gun to fire automatically.

His exhibit, "Domestic Tension," shows the constant stress and fear under which his family and others in Iraq live. And it highlights the detached, remote way both the American public and soldiers experience modern warfare.

"To the Western media it's a virtual war going on in Iraq—we're far removed in the comfort zone," he says. "We're allowed to disengage from the consequences of war. We don't see mutilated bodies, we don't see the toll on human beings."

It is unclear how well he has conveyed his first point.

It is chilling how well he has conveyed the second.

To judge from the blog and chatroom posts on various websites that have linked to his website (www.wafaabilal.com), the majority of people who took shots at Bilal as they watched him over a live Webcam seemed either oblivious or hostile to his antiwar message. The bulk of the more than 62,000 people from at least 128 countries who took aim were apparently video-game and paintball junkies, intrigued by the possibility of shooting someone hundreds of miles away with a click of their mouse.

"They'd say, 'This has nothing to do with politics. I just wanted to see if I could fire from Minnesota and hit someone in Chicago,'" he says. "It was much different on opening night [which was a] very playful atmo-

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